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INDEPENDENT

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Seeking perfection: Boys from Westminster Cathedral choir school, who are aged up to 13, rehearsing in central London yesterday for Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve and carol services on Christmas Day Photograph: Gerald Lewis

Rebels want to reintroduce adultery clause in attempt to wreck Lord Chancellor's 'no fault' reforms

Peers plot to sink divorce Bill

PATRICIA WYNN DAVIES
Political Correspondent

The Government is facing a barrage of wrecking amendments - including one which would restore adultery as grounds for divorce - to the controversial Family Law Bill when it enters its Lords committee stage early next month.

The moves will revive fears that up to 50 religious peers, mostly Conservatives, could be mobilised in a campaign to swing public and political opinion against key aspects of the measure.

If the amendments carry the day, they are likely to form the basis of an onslaught on the Bill by dissident Tory MPs when it reaches the Commons later in

the year, and could expose serious divisions on the Conservative benches.

The fervently anti-divorce Tory peer Baroness Young, a former minister and former Conservative Party vice-chairwoman, has tabled amendments which would reintroduce the grounds of adultery and unreasonable behaviour that the Bill seeks to remove from the present law.

Another amendment seeks to sweep away a second significant plank of the Bill by doubling from one year to two the period of "reflection and consideration" during which couples, using mediation procedures if possible, would be expected to resolve differences over the finances of children.

A further amendment by Lady Young aims to retain the five-year bar on divorce where one spouse withholds their consent.

Amendments put down by the crossbencher Lord Simon of Glaisdale, the former law lord, are, if anything, even more restrictive. One seeks to bar divorce where there is a child under 16, or where a court considers it would not be in the interests of children under 16.

Despite the determined revolt expected among some Tory MPs as well as peers, the measure still stands a reasonable chance of becoming law. The government indicated it will be taken on a free vote but most Opposition MPs and peers are likely to support it.



Lord Mackay: Salvaged Bill

It is likely, nevertheless, to cause fierce controversy within the Conservative Party, which will be especially unwelcome to John Major in the last full session before the general election.

The Bill, salvaged by Lord Mackay of Clashfern, the Lord Chancellor, after efforts by some of his Government colleagues to defer it because of its controversial nature, is bound to be high profile - not least because it could now coincide with the increasingly expected divorce between the Prince and Princess of Wales.

Under the present law, the royal couple could get a divorce within three months on the grounds that they have lived apart for more than two years. But once it is law, the Bill would require the couple to wait a year before finalising a divorce. The law is, however, unlikely to be fully implemented for about two years.

Lord Simon, a former Tory

minister who is vehemently against divorce, has also suggested "affirmation of marriage" clauses to allow spouses to enter into legally binding agreements declaring their marriages indissoluble except by death, or except by death so long as there are children under the age of 16.

Although not all the amendments will be pressed to a vote during the committee stage, scheduled for 11, 18 and 23 January, opponents plan vociferous opposition in an attempt to influence opinion before the Bill transfers to the Commons later next year.

The Liberal Democrat peer Earl Russell has tabled an amendment to delete one of Lord Mackay's concessions to

Tory backbenchers, whose protests stopped the earlier Family Homes and Domestic Violence Bill from reaching the statute book in the last session. The clause would insist that when considering making occupation orders in favour of a cohabitant or former cohabitants, it must take into account the fact that the parties have "not given each other the commitment involved in marriage."

Lord Russell opposes also a clause in the Bill giving the Lord Chancellor the power to require divorcing couples' lawyers to urge the possibility of reconciliation and give advice on mediation and counselling services, and a clause giving courts the power to direct warring couples to attend mediation sessions.

JUMBO CROSSWORD

Win the complete Oxford dictionary on CD-Rom
Weekend page 20

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See page 19 for token and entry form

Outrage as Welsh opera loses bid for lottery cash

JOHN MCKIE

Plans for a Welsh National Opera house on the scale of the Sydney Opera were at serious risk after the Millennium Commission yesterday failed to give a grant for the building.

The Heritage Secretary, Virginia Bottomley, yesterday announced that the latest round of Commission grants funded by the National Lottery would not include money for the £86m Cardiff Bay Opera House.

MPs and Opera Board trustees reacted angrily, blaming an anti-Wales bias, a separate bid for money for a new national rugby stadium and the

controversial modernist design. Lord Crickhowell, chairman of the Cardiff Bay Opera House Trust, was "flabbergasted by the decision" and accused the Millennium Commission of pro-London bias. The Trust had asked for £2.7m to help with building work through to 1997. Plans for the House to open on 1 March 2000 were last night on hold.

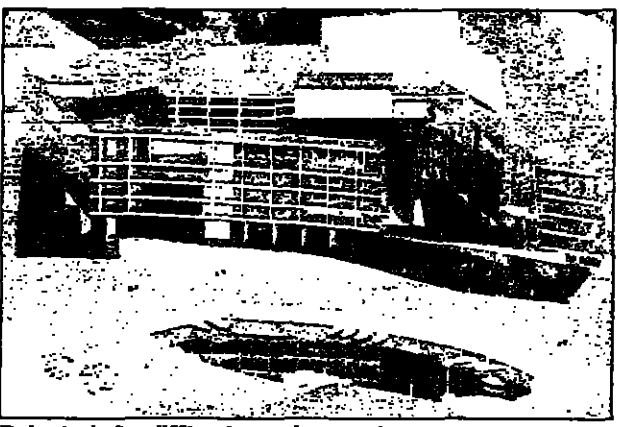
An application to redevelop Cardiff Arms Park in time for the 1999 Rugby World Cup, to be hosted by Wales, will be considered in time for the commission's next round of grants in February. For the past year, the bids for rugby and opera

were thought to be "competing for the soul of Wales". Glamorgan Griffiths, honorary treasurer of the Welsh Rugby Union, refused to gloss. "We have never criticised the Opera House and we are only concerned with our bid," Rhodri Morgan, Labour's spokesman for Welsh Affairs, was one of the few not surprised by yesterday's Commission grants. "If it came to a choice between the rugby stadium and the opera house, then the stadium would come first. The Welsh Secretary of State [William Hague] is a Meat Loaf fan and if you have a Meat Loaf fan as secretary, it's unsurprising," he said.

The bold design of the building is not thought to have helped its chances either. The architect Zaha Hadid won a contest of 257 entrants to design the Opera House and her "glass necklaces" design horrified many Welsh people, and the then Welsh Secretary John Redwood expressed concern about the avant-garde nature of the design.

The Iraqi architect last night said she was "very disappointed" by the Commission's decision but thought her design was not the reason for the lack of funding. "Maybe I'm being naïve, but I don't take it personally."

The commission's deputy chief executive, Heather



Rejected: Cardiff's planned opera house

Wilkinson, said: "To suggest we're running scared of modern architecture is quite wrong. We turned it down because the project wasn't ready."

The Heritage Secretary, Virginia Bottomley, said that more Millennium Commission funds had seen the Opera House than anything else and said the

rejection of the application was to do with risks over "finance, construction and design". She pointed to the £14.5m grant for a Llanelli Coast Park announced yesterday, and added that 10 per cent of the Millennium Commission funds of £336m had gone to Wales.

We were going to call it Bishops Finger. But, ooh, yes we did didn't we.



THE SERIOUS BEER WITH THE SILLY NAME.

IN BRIEF

Knives crackdown call
Labour demanded a crackdown on advertisements for mail order knives, some with 10in blades and known by names such as Rambo Sidearm and Rambo Shortsword. Page 2

Kew awarded £21m
The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, received a £21m grant from the Millennium Fund to protect world flora. Page 5



Fishing curbs agreed
New curbs on catches by Britain's fishing fleet will take effect from next month after agreement in Brussels to cut quotas in an attempt to preserve stocks. Page 4

Man has CJD
An ex-abattoir worker has been diagnosed as having Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease. Page 6

Turkey goes to polls
Turkish voters face a leap into the unknown in tomorrow's general election. Page 10

Today's weather
Mild in the South. Colder in the North, with showery rain that will spread south. Page 2

Holiday price war for Christmas

PAUL RODGERS and IAN MACKINNON

Britain's Christmas festivities got under way yesterday with long traffic jams, almost half a million people flying out to the sun and holiday companies launching a price war.

Thomas Cook announced discounts of up to 15 per cent on package tours a day after Lunn Poly revealed a pay-by-installment plan for holidaymakers. Other companies are expected to follow as the Christmas-New Year selling season swings into full gear on Boxing Day. The latest cuts are partly offset by recent increases by tour

operators of 6 to 9 per cent.

At the same time as announcing its price cuts, Thomas Cook revealed that the rumbling battle it has been fighting with Thomson, Britain's largest tour operator and owner of Lunn Poly, is close to resolution.

But for the Christmas holidaymakers untroubled by discounts and price wars, yesterday was the day when 500,000 of them passed through Britain's airports. Choirs and musical groups entertained passengers at Gatwick, which handled 65,000 passengers by 2 January. 700,000 travellers will have gone through the airport. But there was less joy on the

roads as traffic built up on main routes and an accident on the M1 caused a 10-mile tailback. On the A2 near the junction of the M25 in Kent another accident led to long tailbacks.

Among those fleeing Britain for the festive period, the most popular destinations from Heathrow are Paris, Amsterdam and New York; for Gatwick it is Tenerife, Spain, Florida and Australia. For skiers, the slopes of Switzerland, Austria and France are in demand.

Heathrow airport will handle 800,000 passengers over the Christmas period, while Stansted will play host to 100,000 and Luton to 50,000, a 40 per cent

increase on last year. British Airways will take 250,000 people away over the festive period and is operating 35 flights on Christmas Day, when passengers will get a traditional Christmas meal and will be able to see the Queen's Christmas message.

On the road, motorists were having to contend with accidents, heavy spray and, in places, flooding. "It seems as if many people have taken the afternoon off and roads have been really busy since about 2pm," said an AA Roadwatch spokeswoman. "It's really busy and it's probably going to get worse."

TURN TO PAGE 2

The legislation, to be introduced in a Private Member's Bill, will be backed by the Government and Labour, and is expected to be rushed through the Commons in January.

هكذا من الأصل

Everyone's favourite ingredient: a deer for Christmas



Dinner date: Many of the red deer roaming the rolling hillsides around Brecon Court deer farm, in Gwent, are destined for festive feasts this Christmas

Photograph: Rob Stratton

TONY HEATH

Venison, the flesh of deer, is becoming Britain's fashionable meat. With the lean, dark meat finding its way on to more and more dinner tables – especially around Christmas time – farming deer is now becoming an attractive enterprise for farmers once sceptical of anything other than beef.

Desmond McElney, who runs a herd of 600 on 180 acres of rolling South Wales countryside, said: "The taste for venison has been building up quietly in recent years." He

added that no one was denigrating beef, "but people are now becoming more aware of the fact that farmed venison is an alternative". The traditional suspicions of a food once held to be more Scottish than English is fading as Britons embrace healthier eating habits. Venison's fat content is 6.4 per cent against pork's 26 per cent. Its cholesterol content is about half that of beef.

Earlier this week, several hundred young deer barely six months old were sheltering in barns at Brecon Court deer farm, which Mr McElney took

over in 1988. Before that he worked for 27 years in business before taking early retirement as a multinational engineering company. He and his wife, Barbara, now co-run the farming enterprise on the outskirts of the village of Llanysio, in Gwent.

Older animals roam the hillsides behind high fences. The head stockman, Neil Clark, said he was happy with this year's "rutting" – the breeding service performed by the farm's 21 stags. The rutting season, which lasts for two months, ended a few weeks ago. "The

stags lose up to 20 per cent of their body weight during the rut. Come June we will have an increase of 200 in the deer population here," Mr Clark said.

Unlike sheep, deer do not require dipping and do not attract subsidies. "What the two animals do have in common is an ability to crop grass almost as closely as a lawn mower," Mr McElney said.

The economics of deer farming is uncomplicated by wrangles with the Ministry of Agriculture over cash hand-outs. Depending on the cut, the meat fetches between £1 and £6

per pound from hotels and restaurants which serve venison on the menu.

However, deer farming in Britain is still small-scale. About 40,000 head are reckoned to be farmed on fewer than 400 holdings, compared with 2 million "behind the wire" in New Zealand.

But the British palate is shedding its inhibition. Reviewing his seven years in farming, Mr McElney said: "There's much more interest in venison now. When I began I didn't know a thing about raising deer, but I learnt."

Venison with Port and Shallots

3lb (1.4kg) boned and tied joint
1½oz (35g) butter
1tbs sunflower oil
1 bottle port
1½lb (600g) shallots
1 large orange – strips of zest removed
2tbs plain flour
salt and freshly ground pepper
15g thyme (include stalks if fresh)
15g flat leaf parsley (fresh)
2 bay leaves
2tbs redcurrant jelly

Steep venison and bay leaves in port overnight. Remove meat from dish, retaining port and bay leaves. Drain and pat dry. Peel the shallots leaving some of the root intact. Melt butter and oil in a heavy based

pan and seal the meat all over. Remove and keep warm. Sauté the shallots in the butter turning until light golden in colour. Remove and set aside with the meat.

Stir the flour into the hot butter mixture to make a roux and pour in the port, stirring all the time. Squeeze the orange and add juice to the sauce with the redcurrant jelly, thyme, seasoning and bay leaves. Return meat and shallots to pan and simmer for 1 hour 20 minutes. Half an hour before the end of cooking add fine strips of orange zest to the dish and half the flat leaf parsley. When cooked, cut into slices, pour the sauce over it and scatter the remaining parsley over the dish. Serve with mashed parsnip and potato. Recipe serves six people and is by Victoria Whitbread, of Victoria Whitbread Catering, London.

Tragedy of orphaned boy, 9

JAMES CUSICK

Only two days after attending the funeral of his father, a boy of nine is facing Christmas as an orphan after he found his mother dead in her bedroom.

The double tragedy has shocked the school and family friends of Ben Bradshaw, from Abingdon, Oxfordshire. Described as lively, energetic and polite, he is said to be "lost without his parents".

Police were astonished at the bravery of the boy after he called 999 when he went to his mother's bedroom in the morning and found he could not wake her. Paramedics pronounced Annette Bradshaw dead at the scene.

Thames Valley Police, who released details of the incident yesterday, said they had removed tablets from the house.

Ben was alone when he discovered the body of his mother lying collapsed on the bathroom floor. Police said there were no suspicious circumstances connected with her death.

Mrs Bradshaw, 44, a nurse,



Ben Bradshaw: Parents died within days of each other

had taken Ben to the funeral of his father, Bill, a 52-year-old copywriter who had died from cancer.

Although friends said he fought hard against the spreading disease and had refused to go into a hospice full time so that he could spend as much time as possible with his family, pain had forced him to spend his last week in a hospice. After the funeral, his wife had said both she and Ben wanted to "get back to normal".

David Hastings, a friend of the family who works at Oxford University, said: "It is hard to react other than to be very shocked and sad. Ben took up most of his time – he is a lovely boy, very lively, energetic and always very polite. This is such a tragic way for him to spend Christmas."

Mr Bradshaw's sister, Jean, and her husband Terry, are now looking after Ben at their home in Preston, Lancashire. In an attempt get his life back to

normal as soon as possible, he has been enrolled in a primary school in the town where his cousin is a pupil. However, his Abingdon school friends are missing him.

William Ginger, one of Ben's best friends said: "I can't believe what has happened and I'm very sorry for Ben." William has written a letter to his friend saying: "I am sorry about your mum and dad both dying. I feel really sad for you."

William's mother, Julia Ginger, said Ben was always around her home making noise and playing. "The house seems quiet now that he's gone," she said.

Neighbours who knew the Bradshaws well said they felt he was a "sturdy boy" and that he would be alright with his relatives in Lancashire. Mrs Bradshaw's only surviving relative is her sister, who lives in the United States.

Ben's former headteacher, John Fisher, said: "This is a tragic story that has shocked us all."

"The big fear is that other children who have lost a parent will be worried that they may lose the other."

Jackson set for top of the tree

Michael Jackson looks set to be No 1 in the pop charts for Christmas No 1, say record industry experts.

Jackson's *Earth Song* is expected to hold onto the position at the top of the charts when the new rundown is published tomorrow, despite stiff competition from Mike Flowers' *Wonderwall* – an easy-listening version of the Oasis hit song.

Virgin Our Price made the prediction despite the Flowers single comfortably outselling Jackson in their stores.

Tower Records in Piccadilly Circus, central London, said it was selling three times as many copies of *Wonderwall* but still anticipated a triumph for Jackson.

Head of singles products at Virgin Our Price, Matthew Kreuzer said both records had been selling "incredibly well".

"It's going to be close as to who is No 1 but from what I've heard from the two record companies Michael Jackson is just about ahead and will hang on. Lots of people just go into a record shop in the Christmas week and ask for the No 1 one regardless of who it is. Michael Jackson is the current number one and that will work in his favour."



Jackson: Chart-topper

Industry predictions pointed to a bumper year in the singles market with sales expected to be up 26 per cent on last year.

Andy Mantel, of Tower Records said, Mike Flowers could look forward to being the top seller in the first chart after Christmas. *Earth Song* has been No 1 for the past two weeks. Flowers' *Wonderwall* was only released on Monday.

The outside contender for the No 1 slot is Boyzone, with a remake of the Cat Stevens' Sixties ballad *Father and Son*. Presently at No 2, the Irish band is hanging on to the race for the festive top slot, which will be announced on tomorrow.

Electric rail plans 'shelved'

CHRISTIAN WOLMAR Transport Correspondent

Nearly all rail electrification schemes have been shelved for the next 10 years and rail replacement programmes have been cut back drastically under investment plans for the privatised railway, Labour claimed today.

An analysis of Railtrack's 10-year investment plan published earlier this week makes no mention of most important electrification schemes.

The only new electrification which Railtrack is planning is the Heathrow Express London Paddington to Heathrow scheme and part of the cross-London Crossrail which has been delayed by parliamentary opposition.

Railtrack's 10-year programme of investing at least £1bn a year was criticised by opposition politicians for being the minimum necessary to keep the railway going at the same standard.

In particular, Railtrack forecasts that rail replacement rates decline from the average rate of 2.1 per cent annually in the 1980s to 0.8 per cent for the next 10 years. This implies an aver-

age rail life of 125 years, which compares with a European average of 2.7 per cent (an average of 37 years). According to evidence submitted to the Commons Transport Committee for its recent report on rail finances, such a low level of replacement is not feasible and will lead to deteriorating conditions for rail passengers.

The electrification schemes shelved include Edinburgh to Glasgow Queen St, Scotland's busiest commuter route, the Midland Main Line St Pancras to Sheffield, the Great Western Reading to Bristol, the west of the England and South Wales and Trans-Pennine service from York and Hull to Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool.

Brian Wilson, Labour's transport spokesman, said: "Some of these schemes are crucial to the local and regional economies." Railtrack said last night: "We have identified certain schemes which are going ahead. But it is not an exclusive list and other schemes may go ahead provided there is a viable commercial case for them."

The Dover-Dunkirk train ferry service, which has been operating for more than 60 years, will end today.



How do you celebrate the holidays? We hope you'll drop us a line and tell us. Write to the Jack Daniel Distillery, Lynchburg, Tennessee USA.

ALL OF US HERE AT JACK DANIEL DISTILLERY in Lynchburg, Tennessee hope you're getting your Christmas decorations put up in plenty of time. (From the look of things, our head ricker Jack Bateman is on his way from the sawmill with a freshly-cut pine wreath.) And we hope that no matter where in the world you're from, your holidays will be filled with family, friends and all the other blessings of the season.



JACK DANIEL'S TENNESSEE WHISKEY

news

Fishing rights: Minister says he limited damage for British fleets by winning catch concessions estimated at £30m a year

Trawlermen all at sea over new EU quotas

KATHERINE BUTLER
Brussels

New curbs on catches by Britain's fishing fleet will take effect from next month after agreement in Brussels to cut quotas in an effort to protect dwindling fish stocks.

But EU fisheries ministers, who haggled for 20 hours before finally closing a deal at dawn yesterday, succeeded in extracting significant concessions for their national fleets, toning down the most savage of the

proposed cuts. The European Commission had sought catch restrictions of up to 50 per cent for sensitive stocks such as mackerel, plaice, herring and hake.

In Britain's case, the difference between the commission's proposed reduction in quotas and the final outcome of the negotiations is worth over £30m a year, the Fisheries Minister, Tony Baldry, claimed.

Emerging from the all-night talks, Mr Baldry said he had managed to trim 10 per cent off

the total of proposed across-the-board cuts. "I achieved my objective of securing the best possible deal for British fishermen consistent with the conservation of stocks for the future".

Asked if he believed the deal would satisfy Euro-sceptics in the Tory party who want Britain to leave the EU fishing regime, Mr Baldry replied: "You tell me what deal would satisfy the Euro-sceptics."

Fishermen were predictably critical of the cuts, which will co-

incide with the bitterly contested opening up of fishing grounds west of Britain, the Irish Box, to the Spanish and Portuguese fleets, on 1 January.

They grudgingly admitted that Mr Baldry's efforts had succeeded in softening the blow but complained that new restrictions in the North Sea and western waters would hit British fleets harder than any others.

Barrie Deas, of the National Federation of Fisheries Organisations, said the cuts would force many trawlermen to

choose between bankruptcy or cheating on the quotas. John Wilkinson, a Tory Euro-sceptic and one of the leaders of the recent Commons revolt against the Government's fisheries policy, said: "I shall continue to press for British sovereignty over what should be a British resource in British waters. We want a 200-mile limit and to withdraw from the Common Fisheries Policy so that we can manage our own resources."

Several other Tory MPs and many fishermen want to pull

Britain out of the Common Fisheries Policy. But the Government has no intention of doing so. Apart from the diplomatic damage, it would still have to negotiate intensively with the rest of Europe over fish stocks because they migrate in and out of British waters.

The EU's fisheries commissioner, Emma Bonino, accused ministers of lacking the political courage to take the drastic measures required to sustain stocks. "The longer we postpone these measures the more

serious the problem of stocks becomes," she warned.

British fleets face a huge 33 per cent cut in the mackerel quota. Ministers found this part of the deal virtually impossible to unravel as it had been earlier agreed with Norway, which jointly manages migratory species in the North Sea.

British quotas for sole, plaice, hake, and herring were also cut, but UK fishermen will be able to catch more cod, haddock and whiting in 1996 than this year. Those who fish for valuable

plaice and sole off eastern England were particularly hard hit.

All in all, Britain's quotas next year for the eight main commercial species are 90,000 tonnes lower than this year - a cut of about 14 per cent. The biggest cuts are, however, concentrated on the less valuable types like mackerel and herring.

During the negotiations, Mr Baldry raised the prospect of an eventual phase-out of the quota system, and its replacement by technical conservation measures such as new net designs.

Curbs make 'rise in fish prices inevitable'

GLENDA COOPER

The bright white lights of Billingsgate fish market shone out at dawn yesterday, but inside the atmosphere was distinctly gloomy.

"It's dreadful," said Cyril Duffy, of Nathan Ltd, who sells the fish most affected - plaice, haddock, cod and sole. "Our prices are bound to go up. And it won't just be us that suffers. The prices will go up for everyone, including the public."

Tony Lynes, chairman-elect of the London Fish Merchants Association, said: "There's going to be a reduced volume and prices will go up. Then the fear is that the public won't buy it because they are not prepared to pay. There is no argument about the fact we need quotas. Our argument is about the way they've gone about it."

"What really upset me this week over the fishing row is that it became a way of scoring political points," he added. "Everyone forgot about the real issue which is how are our fishermen going to earn a living. The fishermen are poor relatives of the farmers. They don't get set-asides or any other of the protections."

Chris Leftwich, chief inspector of the Fishmongers' Company, agreed: "Everyone accepts sensible controls," he said. "But they could organise things better. Discards mean that fisher-

men throw different types of fish back into the sea so they don't go over their quota of landed fish. But the fish are already dead so it's not doing any good."

The main target for their vitriol was not, however, the Government or the EU, but the Spanish and French fishermen, who were widely seen as contravening the guidelines.

"The problem is that the Spanish and French will come into the Irish Box and go for juvenile fish," said Simon Newnes, of CJ Newnes.

"There is a limit to what the customer is prepared to pay"

"There's a big market for small fish in Spain. You'll see them with John Dorys no bigger than four inches. How can stock ever replenish if they take those?"

"The price of fish depends on supply and demand," said Steve Hatt, of Steve Hatt Fishmongers. "Obviously there will be cuts and a tendency to put up prices. It's simple mathematics."

Others were not so pessimistic. Geoffrey Molloy, of the UK Association of Frozen Food Producers, said cod prices were

unlikely to be affected because more than 80 per cent of British cod was imported.

The UK, as the world's cod-eating capital, takes 25 per cent of the total international catch, but only fishes 5 per cent of the species itself.

"The housewife won't see very much difference in price because, over the years, we have become increasingly dependent on imports," Mr Molloy said.

"Of the total amount of fresh and frozen fish eaten in the UK, about two-thirds is imported while about 70 per cent of white fish [cod and haddock] is imported, mainly from countries like Canada, Greenland and Iceland."

Other species caught in UK waters which are affected by quotas, such as herring and mackerel, are not particularly popular in Britain and tended to be exported to countries like France and Spain, he said.

John Adams, of the National Federation of Fishmongers, also believed huge price increases were unlikely.

"In the final analysis there is a limit to what the customer is prepared to pay," he said.

"If, for example, cod sells now for £2.50 a pound and the quota is dropped by a half, it does not mean that customers are going to pay £5 a pound. They obviously won't. Customers are very price sensitive."



Market forces: Fish merchants at Billingsgate, London, are increasingly fearful for the future of their industry

Photograph: Glynn Griffiths

Margins of error 'whittled away'

The agreement that European Union fisheries ministers reached in the small hours of yesterday was a classic compromise which leaves fish stocks in real danger of collapse.

This is the view of scientists and nature conservationists who deplore the annual bargaining which leads to dangerously high catch quotas in the North Sea and North-east Atlantic.

Many fishermen agree that stocks are depleted but they also feel the scientists are often over-cautious or mistaken. They have no incentive to fish less; that would only harm their earnings.

John Shepherd, a former senior scientist at the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, points out that if they fished less, they could probably catch more after a few years of stock recovery.

Most stocks have been hammered so hard and so long that they are depressed well below the optimum size for commercial exploitation. About 50 to 60 per cent of the total weight of fish in the main commercial species is taken by man each year. The lifespan of the cod is 30 or more years; in the North Sea almost none survives beyond 4.

Yet in Brussels the ministers agreed an increase in cod quotas. This is because scientists have recently detected a small cod baby boom, caused by natural fluctuations. These natural fluctuations can work both ways, however. A sudden fall in baby fish numbers makes the impact of chronic overfishing far worse; hence the need for caution.

It is caution and margins for error that are gradually whittled away during the Common Fisheries Policy's annual process of setting quotas for each nation. Government scientists first



reach agreement on stock sizes and suggest how many fish might be taken. Next, the European Commission recommends to EU members total allowable catches (TACs) - and is tempted not to incur the wrath of governments and fishermen by sharp cuts.

The final act is for EU fish-

eries ministers to agree quotas. They, too, are under strong pressure from fishermen to squeeze up the quotas. EU governments have little scope for demanding a greater share of the quotas for their own fishermen. So they talk up the TACs.

Nicholas Schoon

WARNING

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And remember, this Christmas, please don't leave any burning candles unattended.

habitat

Judges to review right-to-die case

Three senior Scottish judges are to consider the case of a coma victim - the first right-to-die case in Scotland - because of the legal issues it raises.

The move, announced yesterday, means a delay in any decision in the case of Janet Johnstone, who has been in a coma for nearly four years.

Law Hospital NHS Trust, in Lanarkshire, is seeking a declaration that it would be lawful for it to stop artificially feeding Mrs Johnstone, 52, who doctors say is in a persistent vegetative state with no hope of recovery.

But Lord Cameron of Loch Broom told the Court of Session in Edinburgh yesterday that he would not be issuing a judgment after nearly two-and-a-half days of evidence and legal argument. Instead, he is to make a report which the Inner House of senior judges will consider.

The NHS trust has also asked Scotland's top law officer, the Lord Advocate, to clarify his position on whether a doctor who stops treating a patient would be granted immunity from prosecution for murder or culpable homicide.

Lord Cameron announced that he would make a report to

the Inner House after hearing argument from the Lord Advocate. "It would be inappropriate for me to express an opinion by way of judgment on the factual material and the legal issues raised," he said.

"These are novel and raise most important matters of public policy and indeed policy for this court. I can intimate I will be reporting this matter to the Inner House and will do so as soon as may be."

The Lord Advocate, Lord Mackay of Drumadoon, had suggested such a course of action at the beginning of his argument. He said it was not his intention to frustrate the action which the doctors at Law Hospital wanted to take but he had to ensure that it was legally competent. This was only fair to doctors and the patient's relatives. If the court could not grant permission in such a case then it was a matter for Parliament itself.

Lord Mackay said Scotland was now out of step with the situation in England where there was a judgment from the House of Lords in the case of the Hillsborough victim Tony Bland. This was a problem which had to be put right, he said.

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Millennium landmarks: Plan to rebuild botanic gardens' seed bank hailed as 'one of most important gifts of our generation'

Kew given £21m grant to protect world flora

JOHN MCKIE

The £21m of millennium cash awarded by Virginia Bottomley, Secretary of State for National Heritage, to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, will be one of the "most important gifts of our generation", the recipients said yesterday.

The money will go towards a Millennium Seed Bank which will aim to collect, research and conserve seeds from almost all the United Kingdom's flora by 2000.

By 2010 it is hoped the new institution will have ensured the safety of 10 per cent of the world's flora - much of which is on the verge of extinction.

The bank will be built at Wakehurst Place, West Sussex - the site of the gardens' present seed bank - and will open for the public to see the work sorting, selecting and storing seeds. It will concentrate on species in the UK - with local botanists playing a part in seed collection - and on the species of the arid and semi-arid regions of the world.

According to senior environmental sources, in the next 50 years, some 25 per cent of plant species could become extinct.

The director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Professor Sir Ghillean Prance, said yesterday: "The saving of rare seeds and potentially useful wild species of plants is one of the most important gifts our generation could give to the people of the third millennium."

"There is no doubt that species of plants will continue to become extinct in the wild. The design of the new seed bank

will ensure both the safety of the seeds as a world resource and will allow our visitors to learn more about the importance of seeds and their conservation.

"The installation of this vast expansion to our seed bank is one of the greatest and most important challenges ever faced by the Royal Botanic Gardens."

The total cost of the new seed bank is estimated at £58m. The Royal Botanic Gardens has already raised £30m for private funds and is launching a spring campaign for the extra £7m needed.

The gardens' present bank, which has been operating at Wakehurst Place for 23 years, only contains 2 per cent of flowering plant flora.

The Agriculture Minister, Douglas Hogg, said yesterday that the grant fell in line with the spirit of the Biodiversity Convention which John Major signed at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

He added: "The seed bank will stand as a major contribution by the UK to the conservation of biodiversity at a time of growing international concern about the consequences of genetic erosion."

"The Royal Botanic Gardens is acknowledged worldwide as pre-eminent in its field and the seed bank project should build on its reputation as a centre for scientific excellence."

Mrs Bottomley said: "The Millennium Seed Bank, our fifth national landmark, will be of global significance in the third millennium. Our support for this project stands as a major investment in the well-being of the planet and future generations."



Mighty oaks from little acorns grow: it is hoped the Millennium Seed Bank will save species from the UK and abroad

Photograph: Dillon Bryden



Seeds held at Kew include sea knotgrass (above) and Impatiens gordonii of the balsam family (below)



'Green' schemes given £46m

Virginia Bottomley, the Secretary of State for National Heritage, yesterday announced grants worth £46m from the Millennium Commission to 10 environmental and community projects.

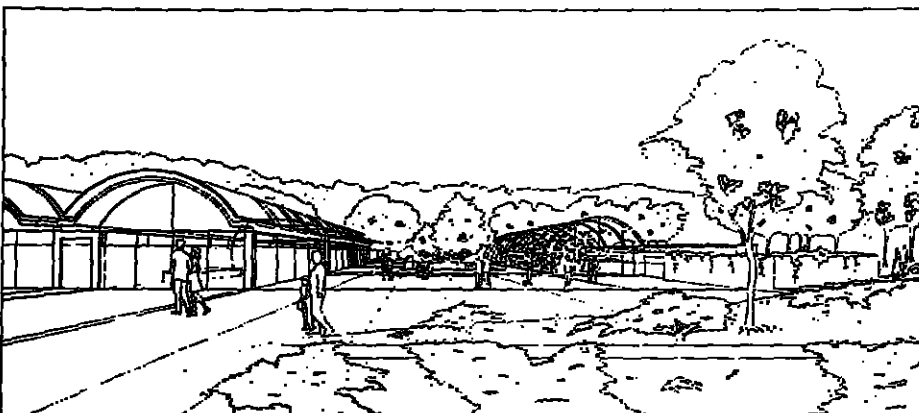
Mrs Bottomley, the commission's chairman, said that the grants were intended to make a significant difference to the quality of life of the British people. The principal recipient is the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, west London, for the Millennium Seed Bank, which

received £21.5m. It becomes the fifth "landmark" project following on from the Tate Gallery, Portsmouth Harbour, an "Earth Centre" at Doncaster, South Yorkshire, and the redevelopment of Hampden Park, Llanelli Borough Council

was awarded £14.5m to extensively restore a valuable stretch of Welsh coastline and create a new coastal park. England's only stretch of magnesium limestone cliffs is to be restored and conserved with the help of £4.5m of Millennium money.

Durham County Council is carrying out £9.9m work on an area which has been damaged by the dumping of waste.

A 60ft observation tower will be the centrepiece of the redevelopment of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust headquarters at Slimbridge, Gloucestershire. The commission awarded the Trust £2.8m towards the £5.6m project. And a new £3.3m National Wildflower Centre is to be set up in Merseyside with the help of £1.6m funding from the commission.



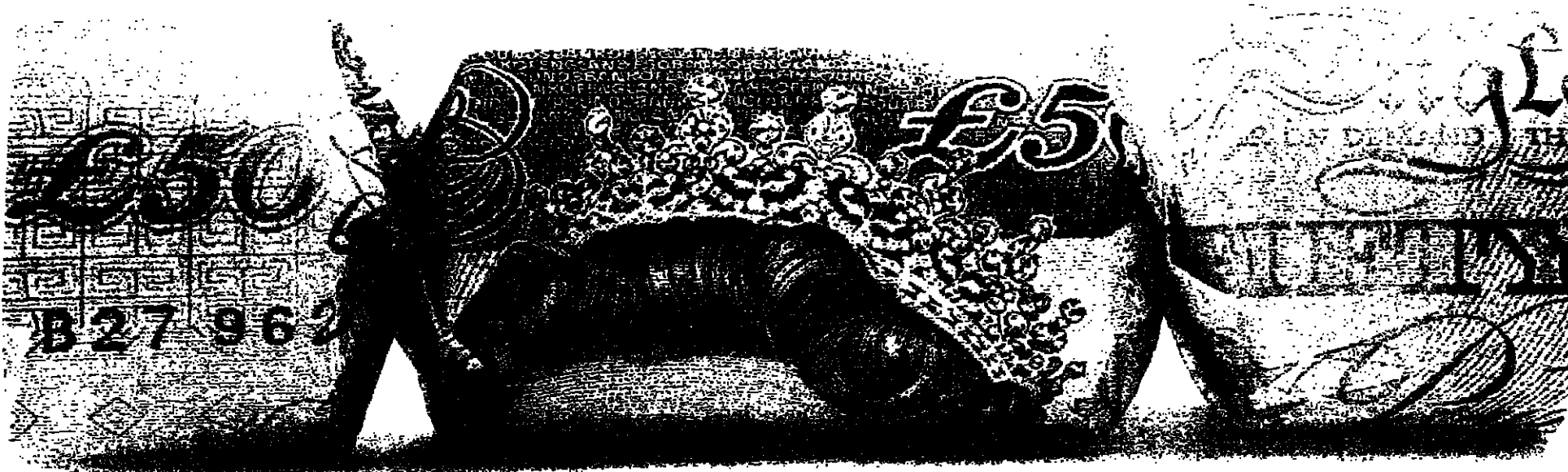
An artist's impression of the Millennium Seed Bank at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

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Beef alert: Ailing victim of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease may have only a few months to live

Fears of BSE link with sick abattoir worker

CHARLES ARTHUR
Science Correspondent

A former abattoir worker is returning home from hospital after being diagnosed as having Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD). The man, who is in his early fifties, will spend Christmas with his family, following tests carried out at York District Hospital.

The case has aroused the interest of the Medical Research Council's CJD Surveillance Unit, based in Edinburgh, which is collating figures to help determine whether it is possible for bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), "mad cow disease", to be passed to humans, causing CJD.

However, a doctor at the hospital emphasised that the case is reckoned to be the first in the area since 1985. "Statistically, we would have expected two since then," said Dr Ray Marks, executive medical director for the hospital's trust.

The Department of Health also said that the number of

confirmed deaths from CJD to the end of November this year was just 29. This compares with 55 for 1994.

The York man is understood to have been a full-time abattoir worker. Dr Marks said that the man is now showing signs of dementia, and that CJD is "the only diagnosis left". The prognosis is not good: "He probably only has months to live if our diagnosis is correct." The man, who will be readmitted to the hospital after Christmas, was examined earlier this week by Robert Will, head of the Edinburgh surveillance unit.

The past month has seen heightened fears that people who have eaten beef from cows infected with BSE or who have been in contact with infected cattle might be especially at risk of developing CJD.

There is no evidence that this can occur. But a number of scientists have commented on the statistical improbability of six recent cases of CJD in the United Kingdom - four involving dairy farmers, and two involv-

ing teenagers. Analysis by Sheila Gore of the MRC's Biostatistics Unit in Cambridge put the chance of this at 1 in 10,000. She said in November that this "signals an epidemiological alert" which required investigation.

The latest case is thought to be the first involving an abattoir worker. Such people might be at risk if BSE could pass to humans because the disease is especially concentrated in the brain and spinal cord. Although the head is removed in one piece, workers have often used water-cooled circular saws to remove the spine - creating what one scientist calls "a fine haze of grey matter" which might be highly infectious.

However, people who develop the disease often do so after the age of 50, according to research data from a number of countries. And CJD is also found in countries which do not have BSE. In some countries, the disease occurs more frequently than the one per million per year that is the average in the UK.



Brief glory: Kenneth Clarke, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, taking charge of the Duchess of Hamilton yesterday at Loughborough Central station on the Great Central Railway, Britain's only mainline steam railway, accompanied by Geoff Morris, footplate inspector (right)

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Former spy on arms charge is denied bail

ROBERT BLOCK
Johannesburg

Paul Grecian, the former British spy, will be spending Christmas in a South African jail after a magistrate yesterday refused him bail on the grounds that he was likely to abscond.

Interpol agents arrested Mr Grecian, 40, when he arrived in Johannesburg for a holiday with his South African fiancée, Elizabeth Powell, eight days ago. He now faces possible extradition to the United States, where he is wanted on charges of fraud, perjury and conspiracy to sell weapons components to Iraq.

US prosecutors from New Jersey asked South Africa to oppose Mr Grecian's application for bail, pending an extradition hearing, and were supported by the court's magistrate, Dion Schnetler.

He said the accused's background in espionage made him a significant flight risk. The magistrate said even if Mr Grecian surrendered his passport and agreed to report to police every day, he could still call on



Paul Grecian: Court feared he was likely to abscond

his experience as a spy to help him flee the country, especially with his MIS connections. The extradition hearing was set for 22 January.

Mr Grecian's barrister, Lawrence Hodes, said he would appeal against the decision at the Supreme Court in Johannesburg on.

Mr Hodes rejected prosecution claims that his client had huge resources, saying that Mr

Grecian was insolvent after his long battle against almost identical charges in Britain. He was finally acquitted last month.

The acquittal by the British Court of Appeal followed admissions by the Government that it condoned Mr Grecian's deals with the Iraqi government in return for information on Baghdad's military capabilities.

Mr Grecian told the court hearing that he had no intention of jumping bail. He said he had never run away from anything in his life and did not want to jeopardise his status in South Africa because of his fiancée.

Mr Schnetler said yesterday that Mr Grecian could face a possible 25-year jail sentence if he were convicted on all US charges.

According to the US indictment, Mr Grecian and his firm, Ordnance Technology, had a contract in the late 1980s to supply Iraq with a factory capable of producing 600,000 artillery fuses a year. The indictment accuses him of obtaining fuse components from a New Jersey-based US firm and pretending that the end-user was Jordan.

Search begins for causes of fatal rig blast

Health and safety experts were yesterday investigating a blast that killed three workmen carrying out tests on an offshore gas rig under construction at a Tyne-side engineering yard.

Two of the men died instantly and the third died of his injuries later after they were caught by a sudden rush of gas at the Howdon yard of Amec, one of the North-east's leading offshore companies. Four other men were hurt in the accident, which happened late on Thursday on a gas rig as nitrogen was being used to test piping systems.

The men who died were all close to the point of release and took the full force of the blast.

One of the injured men said: "As far as I know they were taking a flange off when it happened. I was just assisting the riggers when it went up. The next thing I knew I was just wandering around."

About 40 firefighters were called to the yard but there was no blaze and little immediate sign of damage. Station Officer George Arnott said: "It was a strange scene - nothing seemed out of place except there were three casualties lying there seriously injured. Once we started inspecting the site, however, we realised something quite severe had happened."

The incident was a release of gas under pressure rather than an explosion, he said, like bursting a balloon under very high pressure. "It has probably thrown the men back quite

forcibly and at quite a speed." The dead and injured workers were understood to be members of the GMB union, which represents most of the labour force at Amec.

Martin Gannon, a regional union official, said: "Our hearts go out to the families of the victims... A full inquiry will be held by the Health and Safety Executive and we will be asking for all the details and will be fully involved in that inquiry. We will be looking to make sure this sort of tragedy never occurs in the future." One of the union's first aims would be to give all possible help to the families of the victims, he said.

Dennis Scott, operations director at Amec, said: "What has happened has come as a great shock to everyone... Until we get the Health and Safety Executive reports I am afraid we cannot say too much more about the incident."

"There could be a number of reasons why it happened and I really would not like to speculate before the completion of the investigation."

Mr Scott added: "Obviously everyone is in deep shock and our deepest sympathies go out to the families and friends of the casualties. As a sign of respect we decided to send everybody home so there will be no work in the yard today. It will be closed until further notice."

The four workers who escaped the main force of the blast were all able to go home after hospital treatment.

BBC fines Evans for missing radio show

The Radio 1 disc jockey Chris Evans was fined a day's pay yesterday for failing to turn up for his breakfast show on Thursday.

The £1m-a-year presenter, whose company, Giger Productions, makes the show for the BBC, is believed to have been fined about £7,000 by Radio 1's controller, Matthew Bannister. He spent almost 30 minutes in the controller's office where he was warned about fulfilling his contract. A BBC spokesman said: "Chris has been severely told off and his wages docked, which for him is quite substantial."

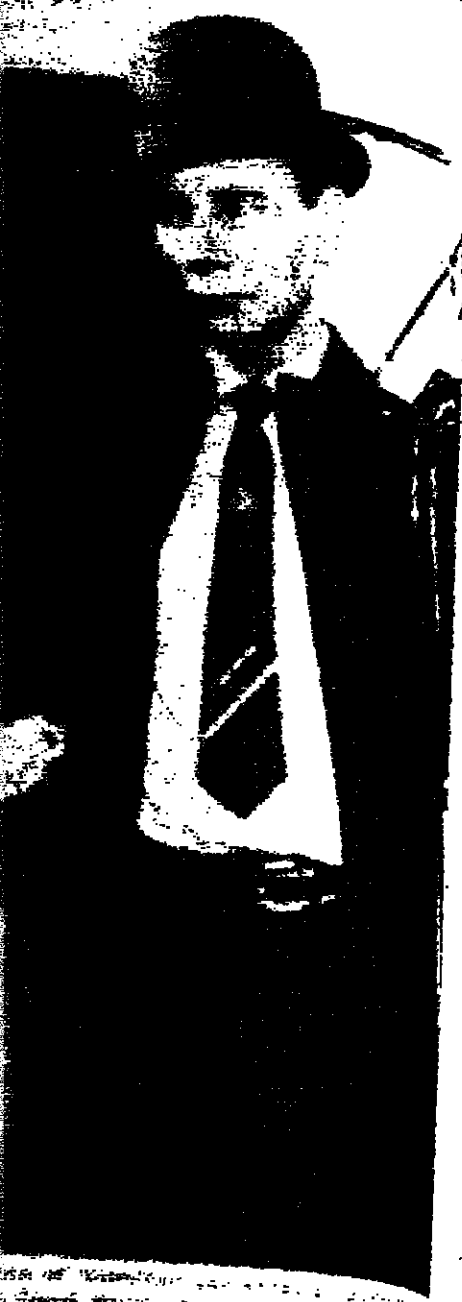
Mr Evans, 29, left Broadcasting House at 10am, refusing to speak about the incident which began when he decided to treat his production team to a Christmas lunch which lasted until early Thursday morning.

When he failed to turn up for work at 4.30am, Thursday's early morning DJ, Clive Warren, stayed on air while a deputy was roused to take over the show.

Yesterday Mr Evans returned to the airwaves in wisecracking style and joked about missing the programme. "It's so good to be back, I feel like I've had a holiday in Bermuda - although it was more expensive than a week in Bermuda, obviously," he told listeners.

Mr Warren also made a dig at the errant star while signing off his early-morning show. "Do you want me to do another half-hour," he joked. "No problem, it's the same price as yesterday. Has he turned up yet?"

مكتبة الامم



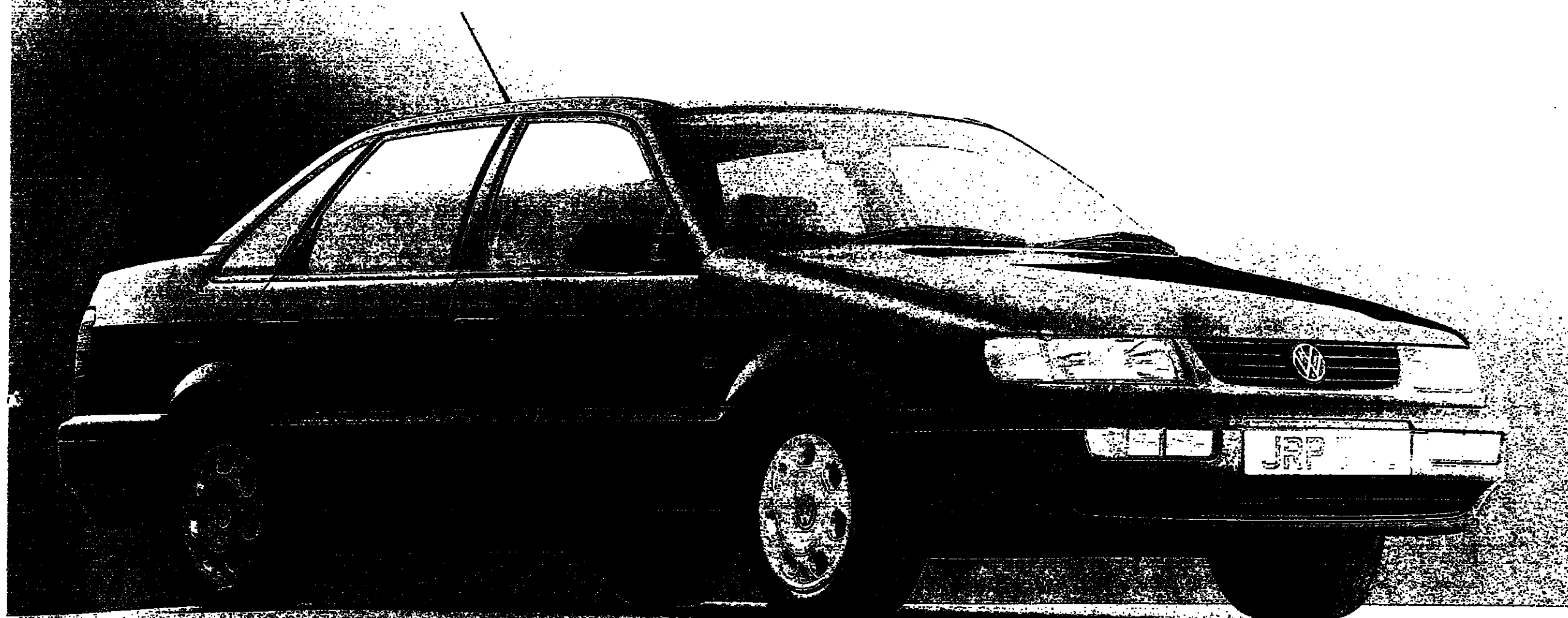
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Oh what fun it is to have Christmas every day

Andy Park (and his dog) are Yuletide crazy. He never takes down the lights, eats turkey every day and gets through 2,400 mince pies a year. Paul Valley went a-calling

At the last minute I realised that I hadn't bought a present. It was Christmas Day, to all intents and purposes, and all that was available on Paddington Station were the usual standby offerings: a box of Cadbury's Roses, a silk tie with a morose-looking Santa surrounded by present-demanding kids, and a pair of green socks with Rudolf the Reindeer on.

The tie was £9.99 and the socks were £4.99. I bought the socks, a sheet of wrapping paper and a little roll of Sellotape and jumped on the train to the West Country.

For anyone else, the socks would have been a once-a-year novelty. But Andy Park could wear them whenever he wanted. He is the man who celebrates Christmas every day.

This is serious stuff. Andy lives alone - "of course", he later added in revealing parentheses. He would have to: this is the man who in the course of his normal year gets through 2,400 mince pies, 100 bottles of sherry and 26 turkeys (he makes each one last a fortnight - "roast, then stew and curry and then soup"). His home is permanently draped in streamers and banners proclaiming Seasons' Greetings. A Christmas tree stands like an unblinking sentinel in the corner of his living-room, and flashing lights pulsate all year round across the mantelpiece. Even his hapless dog, Pickles, sports a constant collar of tinsel. Andy Park lives with the tinnitis of the modern Christmas unceasing in his ears.

I left the train at Chippenham and took a taxi to Melksham. The driver, Stan, of Stan's Taxis, who was 80, was moaning about only having one booking for Monday. He

intended to work normally on Christmas Day, he said; it was because he was religious.

"It's not about Christ. It's just Saturnalia."

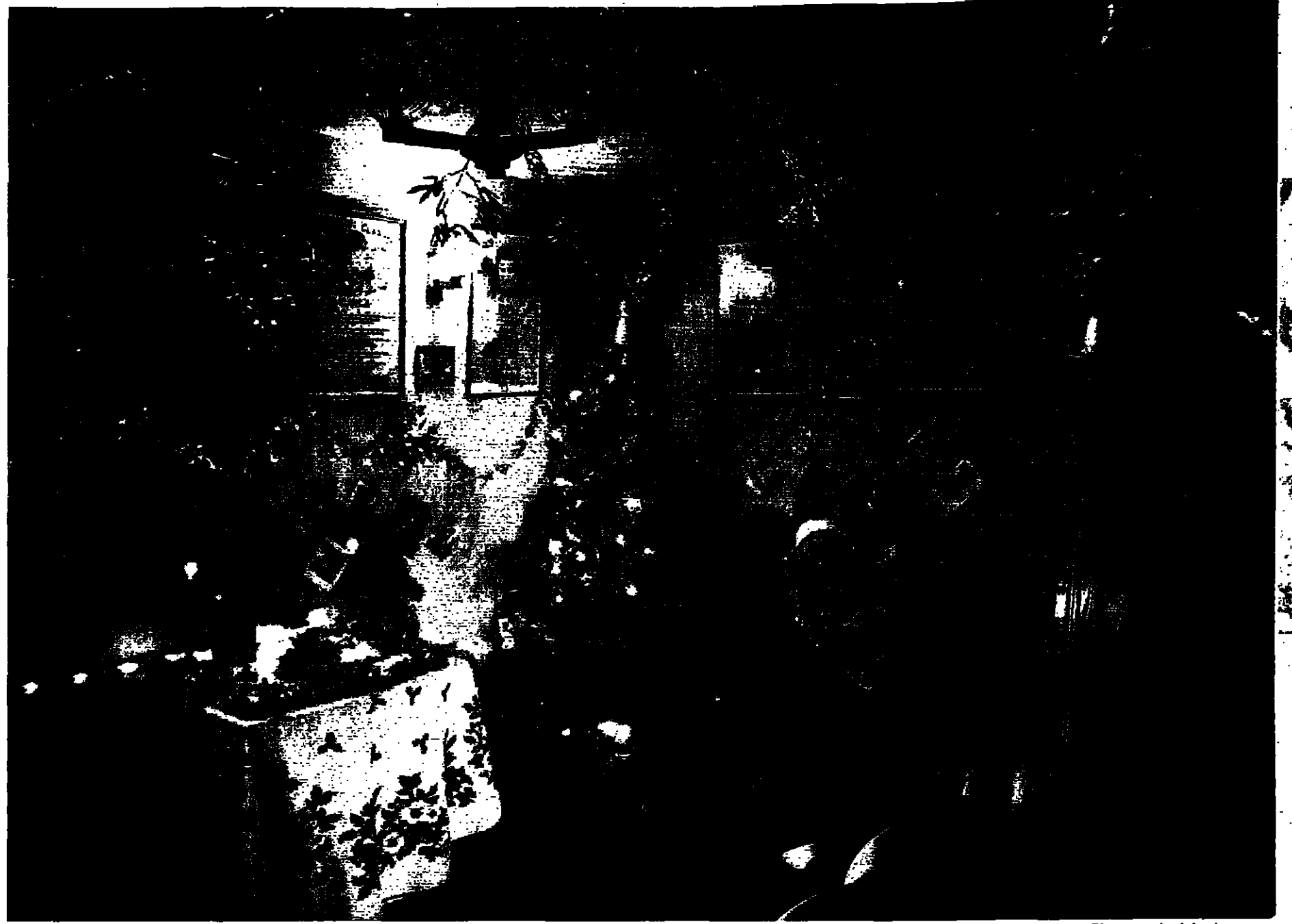
Strictly speaking the Roman time for merrymaking and the exchange of gifts was 17 December, but we got the point. Stan was obviously a churchgoer.

"No, I never go to church. The churches always get everything wrong. I just read the Bible. It's obvious, anyway, that Christ was not born at Christmas. There were shepherds in the fields, which there wouldn't be at that time of year. And John the Baptist, who was six months older, was born in the spring. So Jesus was born at Michaelmas. It's obvious, isn't it? Anyway, the Bible says there is only one day we should commemorate, and that's the Last Supper. 'Do this in memory of me'."

"Mind you," said Stan, his logic suddenly changing tack. "If they are going to put up decorations, they should be up all the time, not just for 12 days. Jesus came to save the world: putting decorations up for a few days is a bit belittling, isn't it? They should leave them up all the year round."

Andy Park would agree with that. He has had his decorations up for seven years now. As we arrived at the little terraced house on a new estate in the centre of Melksham we saw that he has even had a Santa painted on his satellite dish.

Inside, Andy was doing a bit of maintenance on the flashing lights, which he had temporarily removed from the window. The rest of us may have to wonder every year when we get the box down from the attic whether the tree lights will work; not Andy, he



Another day, another Christmas for Andy Park and Pickles. On Monday, though, the rest of the country will be joining in

Photograph: John Lawrence

just fixes them when they bust. It is an expensive business, this perpetual Christmas. Andy reckons he spends an extra £1,000 a year on electricity, £400 on decorations and £300 on flashing lights maintenance (they are on eight hours a day on average). Then there is

'People come carol-singing in June; they know I'll invite them in for a sherry'

£1,000 a year on gifts, £720 on mince pies ("someone makes them for me all the year round"), with the cost of his daily supply of turkey fluctuating significantly according to the season. "And then there's about 100 bottles of sherry - I always have two kinds on the go, sweet and dry." What brands? "All types, I'm not fussy - Bristol Cream, Cyprus sherry, Irish sherry..."

Irish sherry? It would be easy to poke fun, but the grotesque

caricature that is Andy Park's interminable Yuletide says something about the more general paradigm of Christmas, which is nowadays accepted with only nominal objection. His relentless wassail is merely a *reductio ad absurdum* of the way we all behave.

"I love parties, big ones - I hire halls; but I also have small ones at home all the time. Christmas parties all year round. On the Longest Day I have a really big one. This year we had 300 people and 30 pipers playing 'Silent Night' on the lawn."

What do the neighbours think? "They love it. They join in. Sometimes they come carol-singing in June because they know I'll invite them in for sherry, though I make them sing the whole song through properly first."

Could this be true? There were no neighbours around to ask. They were all at work. Andy was the only one at home.

His job is selling reconditioned cookers and fridges, which he advertises in the local paper. "It means I can work at any time of day. Christmas is no problem to me. People ring up desperate for a cooker on

Christmas Eve and I can sort them out. Last year I went out at 9am on Christmas morning to wire one up after an emergency call from a woman with a big turkey on her hands and no oven."

If he transfers his festive spirit to his work, the process is not one-way. He is a bit of a dealer when it comes to Christmas gifts. "I give about 250 presents a year - if people pop round I've usually got something for them. So I get stuff in job lots: 20 things for the price of 10. I do deals all the time. I've got a loft full of wrapping paper I bought last year."

All this ceaseless frolicking began seven years ago, when he found himself living alone. "I was divorced... of course." Of course. "And I thought the place looked so good with the trees up, I decided to leave them there." Friends repeated the old superstition about misfortune following if the trappings of festivity were not removed when Twelfth Night was done. "They said I would have bad luck, but I've never had none. I love my life. It has no stress."

Not that he just leaves "the dees" there. "I change them

every three months or so, because they start to look a bit fragile. I stock up at Christmas so I have plenty for the year. My niece Diana, is coming round tomorrow to clean them all with a feather duster."

There are no problems with dropping needles, of course.

'I'll change the tree soon because the snow is getting grimy'

because the tree, like all the rest of the greenery, is artificial. "Your real tree doesn't last and you can't get a new one in the summer. This one's been up for two-and-a-half years, though I'm going to change it soon because its artificial snow is getting grimy." What the 8th-century English missionary St Boniface would think does not bear reflection: he started the Christmas tree tradition by cutting one for German pagans as a symbol of life.

Still, Andy keeps in step with tradition over what Shakespeare called "the baleful mistletoe". Baleful, perhaps, because it was said to have been the branch used to kill Balder, the Scandinavian god of light, or because of its links with Druidic human sacrifice. Andy's mistletoe is baleful too; it is plastic.

Over lunch in a local pub, where he dithered over venison but finally settled on turkey, we began to get more philosophical. Can things be defined without a context? I asked.

"What?", he replied. Well, just as life is made purposeful and poignant by death, isn't an annual event given meaning by the quotidian days which surround it? "Not really. On 25 December I feel even better because everyone else has decided to join me in Christmas. Everyone is in a party mood." He videos the Queen's Speech for playing back during the months to come.

There is, however, no crib among the seasonal adornments. "I was brought up RC, but I don't go much now. I'm as happy with the Methodists or Spiritualists. But for me, Christmas is mainly to do with

festivities and atmosphere. My two favourite carols are 'Silent Night' and 'Lonely This Christmas', by Mud - you must know it; it was a Number One in the Seventies." In emulation, Andy this year recorded his own Christmas record, "Yuletide, Yeah", which he describes as a bluegrass disco dance track. "Wiggle your bum, toast the day, the Yuletide way," say the lyrics, though sadly he sent it to EMI a month too late for a Christmas pressing.

"It's a time of rest, Christmas, really, isn't it," Andy summed up, thoughtfully, watching the telly. "Noel's House Party, Top of the Pops." It is also, I pointed out, the peak time for loneliness, suicides, family quarrels, divorces, depression and drunkenness. "Well, we don't really want to dwell on that do we?" he replied.

Above the little town of Melksham too the silent stars go by. Yet in the dark streets there shone, as I left, only the lights in the shopping centre. Andy Park is currently campaigning for the town council to keep the Christmas illuminations up all year. The promise of everlasting light, I fear, meant something altogether different.

Jo Brand's week

I was alarmed to read this week that our national heroine, Kate Adie, has been injured in Sarajevo. A lone sniper, perhaps? Shrapnel wounds? Or maybe brave Kate stood in front of a tank to protect small children? No, she slipped on ice and broke her ankle. That must have been galling; even Martin Bell got a bullet. Still, she's tucked up in a private hospital, but she still needs to keep her wits about her given that hygiene is probably controlled by the cleaning firm that costs the least. Let's hope she can bypass slippery floors and sidestep bacteria, not to mention the damage to her wallet (£30 an aspirin in some of these places, you know). Let's hope Kate is back on her feet very soon because, Kate, to paraphrase Bupa, you're amazing and we want you to stay that way.

Likewise Salman Rushdie has been in trouble while on a tour of Australia, sustaining injuries not from a fundamentalist Muslim, but in a car crash. Not many get-well cards coming from Iran, I expect.

I turned on the telly the other night to be confronted with a naked couple writhing about in happy abandon. Assuming it was part two of *Sex with Paula*, I was surprised to discover it was in fact an advertisement for Accurist watches, the writhing couple being accompanied by the throaty statement: "A man who gives an Accurist this Christmas deserves everything he gets." A good seeing-to, apparently. This ad was followed in the next break by an almost identical ad, apart from the fact that a negative had been inserted. Despite similar writhing going on, the woman is revealed as a bit of an old hag, thus demonstrating that if you don't give an Accurist you will end up in bed with an ugly old slepper. Good God almighty, is Biffa Bacon writing the copy for ads these days? Ironic it may well be, but funny it isn't, although no doubt it will appeal to that brain-dead section of the population whose personalities have deserted them and have been replaced by expensive clothes and 23-hour stints in the gym.

Along the same lines, we are informed by the advertisers that the reason most people don't drink Martini is because they feel too ugly. That's obviously why I haven't



Salman Rushdie: in the wars

touched a drop for years. Well, that's not strictly true. I have at parties where the choice at three in the morning is Martini or a glass of Ancient Gut Liquidiser with a few fag-ends and half a sausage roll in it, and regrettably I've plumped for the Martini. I suppose this ad is just another way of saying that Martini is for the beautiful people. Well, they're welcome to it. That leaves the rest of us hideous gargoyles with a selection of other drinks with which to console ourselves when we look in the mirror.

I once told a very attractive Parisian man in halting schoolgirl French that I had been bitten by a swan of handkerchiefs. He never returned from the bar, which goes some way to illustrating the dangers when we

attempt to talk to our friends in Europe. Operation Resolute Rat, which is currently taking place in Bosnia, is unfortunate in that "rat" in that particular area translates as "war". Perhaps not the best way to kick off a cordial relationship between Nato and the former Yugoslavians. Better, I suppose though, than the Bosnian general who was heard, while the peace negotiations were going on, to remark that they were searching for the final solution. Oh dear.

When I was younger and more naive I couldn't understand why some people argued that prison was not a deterrent. It certainly looked it to me. Similarly, I could not understand why some people could possibly want to be admitted to a psychiatric hospital. Having worked in the community I came to realise that some people's homes were so terrible that a break in hospital was looked upon as a bit of a treat.

Given the current outcry about Holloway, it appears not even basic human dignity is being maintained. Most of us have never been inside a prison and our version of it is a mixture of Cell Block 11 and snippets from the news, where of course we didn't see the frustration and neglect. A while ago I did a comedy show inside Holloway, organised by another comedian. We were kept well away from the main bit of the prison and

although everything was done to prevent us really getting a picture of how things were, the nature of the heckling gave us all some idea of the anger and desperation that existed.

The show itself was a bit of a disaster, because it was obviously so rare to gather outside the cells that all the women just wanted to have a chat and pretty much ignored us. At one point I felt I was performing to three hundred women who were doing time for murdering a fat woman comic. The main problem appeared to be a lack of staff, causing long periods of isolation for most inmates. A huge sense of relief flooded over me when the doors clunked shut behind us. Prison is still a deterrent for me.



Holloway: I was glad to get out

I did some publicity photos today and spent quite some time being made up, which is great because I am so hopeless at putting my own make-up on. In fact, the make-up woman did a good job and I was beginning to think I didn't look half bad. As I left the studio feeling rather smug, I heard an old bloke on the gate say to his friend, "There goes that fat girl off the telly." Cue... deflation.

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Even a Pocahontas Christmas is a chance to dream

When pagans celebrated the mid-winter solstice, they had no pangs of conscience. They slaughtered a few animals, mixed up something hot and alcoholic and settled down to having a good time. True, they might have been plagued by the in-laws, difficult children and terrible hangovers, but the British Flintstones knew what the festival was about. They were ready for a break after months of freezing weather and more to come. The December feast was a chance for a change, an opportunity to feel good in the bleak mid-winter. People knew that they would have to return to the gloom, but at least they felt a warm glow for a while. In short, the celebration was a pleasant and worthwhile distraction from the misery of the damp and cold.

These days, we're nothing like as clear about what Christmas means. We torment ourselves with guilt, at the vast amount of spending, at all the food and the drink consumed. There is a sense of shame about it, a feeling that the paganism of the modern day is obscene and something should be abandoned. Each year, we carry on with the annual binge, and then we hate ourselves for it. For a few days, we all know what it is to be the Princess of Wales.

And then there is the navel-gazing over the supposed hypocrisy of Christmas. Critics decry the bonhomie. They dismiss the cheer that mysteriously appears in the third week of December, and disappears as quickly by the first week in January as misanthropy dominates once

again. There is also, as our letters' column has recently revealed, endless concern about whether or not children should be told the truth about Santa Claus. "We're damaging them by telling them lies," warns the anti-fantasy brigade. Meanwhile, the self-righteous look accusingly at church attendances and suggest that people lack sincerity, that they treat churches as theme parks, turning up for the Christmas Eve carol service, never to darken a church door for the rest of year.

All of these phenomena – the over-indulgence and the brief flirtation with church-going – lead many to think that Christmas is a rather sad exercise in empty consumerism, superficial religiosity and insincere philanthropy. Would it not be better if there were no Christmas at all?

To ask that question is to begin to reveal the modern meaning of the event. It is, like the pagan feast, a chance to live out a collective fantasy, an opportunity to imagine a different, summery world. The fact that that world disappears soon after does not make its invocation a waste of time.

For children the collective fantasy centres on Santa, a virtual deity, who loves all children and makes a trip to every home. He is an utterly benign figure. Suggesting his existence is not a lie, it is giving a child a chance to dream. The Santa image, and its notion of no-strings-attached giving, is important in helping children have a sense of their own intrinsic value.



So what about the adult collective fantasy: the idea that we all love each other according to the principles of Christianity? All right, so we don't. And we never did. There is no point in feeling nostalgic if Christianity had ever really dictated everyday behaviour, the history of the world would have been very different.

No one really believes that their old differences have suddenly dissolved at Christmas. We are meant to play along with the fantasy of Christmas, a bit like children who already know the truth about Santa. It does no harm to mark a few days in the year at a time when everyone takes the goodwill tablet. Who knows, like turkey, people might begin to fancy it all year around.

The Royal Family does not seem to have grasped this tradition. Princess Diana and the Queen, fighting to make their candidates King (Wills in Diana's case, Charles in the Queen's) could not let matters rest until January amid Yuletide good humour. So the Princess refused to turn up at Sandringham for Christmas and the Queen ordered a divorce, five days before Christmas Day. The spirit of Christmas does not seem quite to have reached the Supreme Governor of the Church of England.

Speaking of religion, Christian images are not as prevalent as they once were. Characters from *The Lion King* have replaced religious pictures on chocolate advent calendars. A plastic figure of Pocahontas is as sacred as a relic would once have been from Santiago de Com-

postela: Walt Disney is establishing a monopoly of the supernatural. We are also living in a period when fame, power and wealth create the elect, those apparently heading for the right life. Grace, holiness and sanctity are conferred more by the camera than by good works.

But Christianity, at this time of the year, does still have a powerful message. To believers, Christmas represents a new beginning of unique impact on the world, the birth of a saviour for the human race. But even to those who do not believe, the season's message contradicts conventional values. What is splendid about Christianity is that it says the woman who makes Nike shoes on a Third World poverty wage is as important and valuable as the woman who endorses them for a huge fee. And the focus of worship at Christmas is not some great powerful, authority figure in a sharp suit, with loads of money and few scruples. It is, instead, a picture of helplessness, a needy baby. This is an image that emphasises the idea of renewal, going back to the pagan origins of the festival.

In short, it is never going to be Christmas every day. The whole point of it is to enjoy a special time, think and believe afresh, even if by Twelfth Night we're back to where we were on Christmas Eve. So follow the example of the Flintstones. Set aside the guilt, enjoy the feast, try being nice to people and let a little hypocrisy pass unremarked. The harsh winds of January are not far away.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Diana: betrayed, sidelined or ... awkward?

From Mrs Jennifer Miller

Sir: In your editorial "Divorce is the only answer for a modern age" (22 December), you unquestioningly accept that the Royal Family has sought to marginalise and exclude Princess Diana.

When she married, her own grandmother, Lady Fermoy, had been established at Court for years on the staff of the Queen Mother, whose close personal friend she was. Diana's brother-in-law was already a private secretary to the Queen, and her father, Earl Spencer, had been a royal equerry. She always had her own relatives and contacts within the royal household and cannot have been isolated as she now claims.

On her separation, Buckingham Palace announced that the Princess would still be invited to Balmoral and Sandringham, but even at Christmas 1992, she caused immense trouble by refusing to visit Sandringham, making it seem as if she were cruelly kept from her children at such a time.

When Diana wanted to resume public life, the Queen agreed last year that her daughter-in-law should take on the

prestigious role of spearheading celebrations for the 125th anniversary of the British Red Cross. During 1995 Diana has visited Russia, Japan, Hong Kong, Venice and Argentina, and travelled several times to the United States. Does this look like being sidelined?

The Prince of Wales gives Diana such a generous allowance that in May she was identified as a "Super A" shopper: one of a small group of really high-rolling consumers. Yours faithfully, JENNIFER MILLER, London, SW15 22 December

From Mr Robert Readman Sir: In advising (ordering) the Prince and Princess of Wales to divorce, the Queen and her advisors have seriously underestimated the depth of support for the Princess of Wales.

The Prince of Wales has betrayed his wife from the outset of his marriage. He now seeks to cast aside a woman who is 10 times the man that he is, obtain public approval for his mistress and still ascend the throne to become "Defender of

the Faith". For Prince Charles, as a divorcee, to become King would be an act of monumental hypocrisy, not only on his part but on the part of the Archbishop who places the crown upon his head.

The Royal Establishment, in a desperate attempt to shore up its crumbling edifice, is thrashing about in a frantic effort to preserve itself. But sidelining Princess Diana will only serve to further erode the Monarchy in the eyes of the people.

If Buckingham Palace cannot recognise that Diana is the real jewel in the Crown, it does not deserve the support and respect of the country. Sincerely, ROBERT READMAN, Sandbanks, Dorset 21 December

From Mr Gerard M Blair

Sir: Given the continuing troubles between the Prince and Princess of Wales, it seems unfortunate that they were unable to talk with President Clinton during his recent visit. Yours faithfully, GERARD M BLAIR, West Linton, Borders 21 December

Ranting about European monetary union

From Mr Christopher Haskins

Sir: Hamish McRae is perfectly entitled to be against European monetary union ("Why the ranters are right about EMU", 22 December). But he himself is beginning to rant when he brands as "stupid" those who believe in the idea – the leaders of 14 out of the 15 members.

Throughout the development of the European movement its supporters have been berated in this way, yet time and again they have proved correct. What's different this time? Of course the implementation of monetary union is fraught with institutional and fiscal difficulties. But the tide of history is running towards greater economic as well as political harmony between states, and EMU is part of that process.

The need for the transfer of funds from the better-off to the less well-off regions of the Community is well-established, and will be reinforced in the future because of both EMU and enlargement. The idea that the United States economy only works because the population is perpetually on the move is a bit far-fetched.

So, we come back to the issue of devaluation – the last resort instrument that has plagued the British economy since the War. EMU most cer-

tainly rules that option out in the future – one of the strongest reasons for supporting it. With the sad exception of the United Kingdom, the European political leaders continue to show imagination and courage in pressing on with EMU, despite the obstacles. They most certainly are not being stupid.

Yours faithfully, CHRISTOPHER HASKINS, Northern Foods, Hull, East Yorkshire 21 December

From Mr Andrea Casalotti Sir: Hamish McRae's attack on European monetary union rests on the fallacy that governments can fine-tune the economy by fiscal and monetary policies. The best a government can do is give a simple inflation rule to an independent central bank, and then work on decreasing the inefficiencies in the system.

That is what EMU is attempting to do: an independent central bank and the elimination of the inefficiency of 14 separate currencies. If a region is suffering economically, lowering the world prices of its products (by devaluation, for instance) is rarely going to work. It is by increasing the quality and uniqueness

of its output that prosperity will be found. Look at the difference in quality of manufactures from a strong currency country like Germany and those from a weak currency country like Britain.

The debate in Germany over economic performance is not about the strength of the mark but about the loss of innovation. Germans know that future growth is guaranteed not by making the same products cheaper but by making them better. Britain will not stop its century old decline until it understands this. Yours sincerely, ANDREA CASALOTTI, London, NW1 21 December

From Mr Henry Brownrigg

Sir: There is a lot to be said for "play it again, Nero" league. It is obvious that the more Charles and Camilla can get it together, the better off they will be. Then, at last, stiffness can migrate from the upper lip. She will begin to look younger and he can stop mounting horses (a traditional royal displacement activity).

But what is it that emboldens the Archdeacon to speak like this to the heir to the throne? He hasn't been trained by Relate or the Samaritans. The dictionary tells us that an archdeacon is essentially little more than a bishop's lackey. And don't be fooled by the "Venerable" – that can mean either "worthy of reverence" or "account of great age, religious associations, character, position etc." or simply "title given to archdeacon in the Church of England". In Austin's case, it is clearly the latter. And that is his sole qualification for seeking to direct the Royal Hibdo – his senior membership of the C of E. So it is also that the Archbishop of Canterbury, a man of extreme moderation – intellectually, spiritually and charismatically – as leader of the established church, has to be consulted by the Queen on whether Charles can divorce.

I can tolerate the Church in its place; doing good works, preaching tolerance and maintaining cathedrals. But dressing up in silly hats and carrying funny sticks, like extras in a bad remake of *The Prisoner of Zenda*, or intoning platitudinous rubbish in a sing-song voice does not, in my opinion, qualify you for a major role in deciding the constitutional future of the nation. If the Queen wanted good advice, she should have consulted

DAVID AARONOVITCH

Faith value

Of all the indignities heaped upon the Prince of Wales's head this week, being told who not to screw by a tubby, middle-aged prelate must be the worst. The Venerable George Austin, Archdeacon of York, has spoken thus of Charles and Camilla (the woman whom HRH has adored for two decades): "If they remain friends, that's fine. If he carries on a relationship, that's quite another matter. Adultery is a sin."

As advice goes, this is in the "play it again, Nero" league. It is obvious that the more Charles and Camilla can get it together, the better off they will be. Then, at last, stiffness can migrate from the upper lip. She will begin to look younger and he can stop mounting horses (a traditional royal displacement activity).

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Claire Rayner ("Darling, of course you're anxious, but nobody will thank you for getting involved. Have you thought about Prozac?")

My own preference would be for Charles to eschew religion altogether. The historical imperatives behind the establishment of the Church of England have now been exhausted. We do not need a replacement.

But for some time now, I have been uncomfortably aware that this rationalist viewpoint is increasingly unfashionable. Where previously Christians and other Deists used to keep quiet for fear of ridicule, today's dinner parties are dominated by bold confessions of faith.

Only a few weeks ago, two very good friends of mine proudly told an animated group of media folk that they were experiencing immense benefit from "psychic massage". I got ready for a really good scoff (how does the masseur get his fingers through your ears, that kind of thing), until I realised that everyone else was taking it seriously.

My unbelief was passé, boring, a relic of duller, more rational times. Within minutes, perfectly sensible people were swapping tales of the New Age, of crystals, reflexology, aromatherapy and God. It is now perfectly possible to be assailed for your improbable faith in European Monetary Union by someone who wishes to be reincarnated as an ant.

Admitting defeat, I propose that we handle this whole establishment question in a more efficient manner. My proposal is this: the State (Queen, PM, Governor of the Bank of England and Director-General of the BBC) should put the contract for established church, or religion, out to tender. Applicants could be judged on the basis of their modernity, the enthusiasm of their adherents, the age and gender profile of their congregations and what they offer in the afterlife.

Once awarded, the contract should be reviewed at the beginning of each reign by Oigod, whose first Director-General should be anyone other than the Venerable George Austin.

QUOTE UNQUOTE

Apart from a few set-piece debates, the Chamber of the House of Commons is dead and to a large extent irrelevant. It is no longer the forum of the nation – Lord Westbury, former Speaker

For me, the currency of deep caring at a painful time such as this is silence – Frances Shand-Kydd, the Princess of Wales's mother

The Royal Family would be a bargain if we paid them twice as much – Kenneth Baker, former Home Secretary

Now Santa Claus is endangered, we'll work on God next – Merle Hoffman, feminist, on New York's first female Father Christmas

She was a very nice girl, but Father Christmas should be big and fat and jolly. She didn't say 'ho, ho, ho' once – Helen Doherty, on Mother Christmas at a council-run grotto in Luton

This guy was the original soap scriptwriter. I was amazed by the outrageousness of the characters and situations and the pitch of the drama – Darren Star, creator of American soap operas including *Beverly Hills 90210*, on Charles Dickens

When things go wrong, Antarctica is one of the cruelest, most unforgiving places on Earth – Roger Mear, who abandoned his solo unsupported crossing of the Antarctic due to bad weather conditions and problems with his sledges

Why drug killings threaten ceasefire

From Mr Sean Kearney

Sir: David McKitterick's article "How the guns kept drugs out of Belfast" (21 December) states that everyone relaxes after a murder when it becomes clear that "the incident represents no threat to the ceasefire". In our experience, far from relaxing, everyone is greatly apprehensive after the recent murders, and few expect that they are not a breach of the ceasefire.

Mr McKitterick writes that "in the Republican districts, where drugs were taking hold, many people openly approved of this violence". A minority of people can be found to approve of the most dastardly deeds, but for everyone who approves there are three victims and their families who strongly disapprove.

Our view is that the IRA and its loyalist counterparts are guilty of the vilest human rights abuses, and the latest murders, leaving 10 children without fathers at Christmas, amount to an atrocity. To excuse these murders on social grounds is akin to arguing that the Nazis introduced law and order to a society that lacked it in the Thirties. The IRA would impose a similar regime here in Northern Ireland. We call on all right-thinking people to reject violence unequivocally.

Yours sincerely, SEAN KEARNEY, Families Against Intimidation and Terror, Belfast 22 December

Dry measure

From Mr Michael D Mitchell

Sir: I can tell Simon Martin (Letters, 18 December) why the Government won't make alcohol available on prescription. It's because prescriptions are so ruddy expensive that nobody would drink anything, and Tory coffers would be even emptier than they are already. Yours faithfully, MICHAEL D. MITCHELL, Flackwell Heath, Buckinghamshire



Adoration of the Magi, by Albrecht Durer

A star is born

From Mr Stewart Campbell

Sir: Astronomers should stick to astronomy; interpretation of the Bible is best left to those who understand it ("Christmas Star shines in a cosmic ballet", Science, 20 November).

Dionysius Exiguus did not make a mistake in his calculations and Jesus probably was born in 1BC. The stories of Jesus' birth are all invented, as is any association with Herod the Great.

The Star too is an invention, probably deriving from Levi

19:3 and the Talmud, which predicted that "when the Messiah is to be revealed a star will rise in the east...". It may also echo the story of the birth of Mithras, where a star fell from the sky and was followed by Zoroastrian priests called "Magi" on their way to worship the newly born god.

Astronomers look for a celestial sign that existed only in the imagination of the evangelists. Yours faithfully, STEWART CAMPBELL, Edinburgh 19 December

Boxed Broadway

From Professor Peter Smith

Sir: May I add a footnote to Sue Rolfe's letter (21 December) about the Theatre Museum's archival videotape collection of stage productions?

A similar archive can be found at the New York Public Library branch at Lincoln Center, where the kind of unions-permitted recording she describes has been taking

place for at least 20 years. Containing the Broadway versions of productions transferred from the West End, as well as just about everything originating in New York, the NYPL collection is a remarkable treasure trove.

Yours faithfully, PETER SMITH, Professor of Theatre Arts, Columbia University, New York City 21 December

Industrial policy by consensus

From Mr Gerald Frankel

Sir: Chris Blackhurst's article "City fails to buy Blair's 'New Labour' message" (21 December) reports Hemmington-Scott's poll of 600 company directors and their views of corporate Britain under a Blair government.

Its sceptical findings do not match the experience and confidence of the company directors who are involved with the Industry Forum – the organisation established in 1994 to facilitate an ongoing dialogue with industry, the City and the Labour Party. The members have been increasingly impressed by Labour's activity to develop industrial policy by consensus and to set up a genuine dialogue with British business representatives throughout the UK.

Shadow Trade and Industry Secretary Margaret Beckett heads a series of taskforces in which key members of industry and the financial sector are exchanging views with the Labour Party to help shape its industrial policy. Far from dashing Labour's hopes of winning over the business community, as Mr Blackhurst suggests, it is my experience as chair of the Industry Forum that all our cross-party membership remains open-minded. In addition, increasing numbers are convinced that Labour will succeed in its consensual approach and has already demonstrated a clear understanding of the country's industrial needs.

Yours faithfully, GERALD FRANKEL, Chair, Industry Forum, London, W1 21 December

Communists: the sensible choice?

From Mr David Morgan

Sir: Most press and television reports on the Communist Party's electoral triumph in Russia have amounted to an exercise in sour grapes; the favoured reformers came a cropper, the much touted Lebed got nowhere, the hated Reds came top. Alas your own approach has differed little from the rest of the pack.

Had the result gone the reformers' way, it would have been applauded as a victory for common sense and a signal of a mass ideological conversion to the virtues of the free market. Instead, it has been almost universally reported negatively, characterised as a mistake, a protest vote, a final bout of nostalgia for the old "Brezhnev stagnation era".

Russians are not used to this. Perhaps it is simply that they are not as "realistic" as we in the West. Yours, DAVID MORGAN, London, W5 21 December

The fish's tale

From Mr Steven Carr

Sir: David Ould writes (Letters, 22 December) that Jonah and the whale may be credible. Perhaps he is unaware that whale is a mistranslation for fish and that the story is meant to be humorous.

Jonah refused to go to Nineveh and had to be taken there in a giant fish. The goddess of Nineveh was Ishtar, whose symbol was a big fish. The symbolism would have been obvious to Jonah's first readers as if we read a story of someone who refused to go to Wales and ended up being carried there in a giant dragon.

Yours sincerely, STEVEN CARR, Prenton, Merseyside 22 December

Stage training

From Mr Ian Dickens

Sir: Has anyone noticed the historical irony in the award of the franchise for South West Trains to the bus company Stagecoach? The first chairman of the London and South Western Railway, the original "south west trains" was William Chaplin, of the firm of Chaplin and Horne who were well-known London operators of stagecoaches!

Chaplin was invited to put his knowledge of the road transport industry at the service of the railway. Realising that the railways would be the death of his coaching business, he persuaded his partner Horne that they should sell nearly all their coaching stock and invest the proceeds in the new form of transport. A risky, but in the end a wise decision. I hope his successors in Stagecoach have the same quality of guts and vision for their South West Trains.

Yours faithfully, IAN DICKENS, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands

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Letters may be edited for length and clarity. We regret we are unable to acknowledge unpublished letters.

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PROFILE: Camilla Parker-Bowles

In silence she awaits her Prince

Charles may never remarry, but that does not make his mistress a loser, argues Mary Braid

Once again Camilla Parker-Bowles proved something of a nightmare assignment for the paparazzi yesterday. In the media scramble following the Queen's plea this week to her son and daughter-in-law to seek a divorce, the Princess of Wales at least rewarded photographers by turning up outside her west London gym with Prince Harry and Prince William in tow. The future king's mistress, by contrast, seemed to have gone to ground.

Once again the contrast between the two women was stark. Beautiful, saintly Di, never more alive than in front of a camera, was still battling it out in the media glare. Camilla, the witch with the lived-in face who shattered a national fairy-tale without even having the decency to be beautiful, remained resolutely publicity-shy - even when her Prince revealed to the world that, after a relationship spanning 20 years, he has no plans to marry her.

But then silence and discretion are Camilla's trademarks. This is a woman who has endured without a whisper an avalanche of public insults, even a pelting with bread rolls by a customer in her local supermarket after Prince Charles told millions about their affair on television (she no longer does her own shopping). This is a woman who once encountered a journalist breaking into her downstairs loo; and who had the contents of a family album, taken without her consent, splashed all over a newspaper. There was a photograph of her in a bikini and another of the Prince of Wales with Camilla's baby son Tom, now 20 and the Prince's godchild, in his arms.

Perhaps the difference in approach between the wife and the mistress - they are 14 years apart in age - marks an abandonment by young aristocrats of the upper-class code that sanctioned discreet affairs as an integral part of the business of marriage, and frowned on the public airing of scandal. It was this code that allowed Queen Alexandra to invite Camilla's great-grandmother, Alice Kepple, mistress to

Edward VII, to join the family around her husband's deathbed.

Times have clearly changed. But in Camilla we have a blue-blood who still plays the game by great-grandmother's rules. In the three years since her affair with the future monarch became public she has said nothing. Neither has she licensed friends to have a quiet word with the media on her behalf.

With so little from the horse's mouth, the question of whether she is weeping her way through this weekend - a lonely, washed-up, middle-aged woman who forfeited marriage and social standing for love - is largely speculation. It is just as likely that the woman Prince Charles describes as his "touchstone" is looking forward to Christmas, optimistic that at last her relationship with Charles is being manoeuvred into calmer waters.

There are two contrasting public views of Camilla Parker-Bowles. One has her as a Barbour-wearing, fox-hunting, country-loving good sort, fun but rather unintellectual. The other is more Machiavellian. It rests to some extent on a photograph of Mrs Parker-Bowles and the young Princess Diana during her courtship with Prince Charles. Given what we now know, the image of the mistress perhaps offering a little friendly prenatal advice is a touch chilling.

In fact Camilla Parker-Bowles has a conventional aristocratic background. She was the first of three children to be born to Major Bruce Shand, wine merchant, charabanc owner and vice lord-lieutenant of east Sussex, and his wife, Rosalind Cubitt, whose family which made a fortune building London's Belgraveia. A life of leisureed luxury was ensured for Camilla when one of her Cubitt grandparents left her a £500,000 inheritance. Her family had well-established connections with the Royal Household.

She had the usual British upper-class education, failing to take any A-levels but managing a year at Swiss finishing school. She came out in 1964. It was the swinging and socially fluent Sixties, but for girls



Camilla Parker-Bowles: unlikely saviour of the monarchy?

Photograph: George Phillips

like Camilla society had not really changed. More than 300 well-bred girls were presented at court that year, amid a round of parties which allowed the richest families in the land to introduce their offspring to each other. Peter Townsend, society correspondent for *Tatler* for 40 years, remembers Camilla, but only vaguely. "She was not particularly beautiful or outstanding in any way, but she was nice."

The debs' ambition was to snare a rich and eligible man by the end of the season. Marriage was what they had been raised for. Camilla was an almost spinsterly 26 by the time she married Andrew Parker-Bowles, a young adjutant in the Blues and Royals.

Camilla first met Prince Charles at a polo match in 1970. He became smitten with her bubbly personality and the first phase of their long relationship began. But Charles dithered about proposing, and while he was away at a long tour at sea she accepted the proposal of the rival suitor, Parker-Bowles.

Her affair with the Prince appar-

ently resumed in the late Seventies, by which time her husband was a polo-playing friend of the Prince, and Silver Stick in Waiting at the Court. It seems that Brigadier Parker-Bowles, who apparently exercised some latitude with his own marriage vows, did not object as long as the affair was discreet. It remained that way until the Princess of Wales chose to make it public through Andrew Morton's first book. Says one newsman who has frequently doctored her: "She is one of the old school and her ex-husband is cut from the same cloth." He adds: "She and Prince Charles seem devoted to each other. You can't help thinking that's quite sweet after all these years."

Townend disputes the notion that Camilla is a woman who has lost it all. "I doubt if she wants to be Queen and go around opening bazaars. I think she is quite happy with her horses and she has her children, Tom and Laura." In other words, she may be content to be among a time-honoured tradition of royal mistresses, joining the

Prince on the Beaufort hunt and sharing his love of the countryside and painting. The new house she is waiting to move into, as a divorcee, is almost as luxurious as the one she shared with her husband. The difficult business of "royalising" Camilla may never be necessary.

Nigel Evans, editor of *Majesty* magazine, suggests that Camilla's silence, rather than Diana's openness, may yet prove the saving of the monarchy. It is a rather shaky theory, after years of intense public scrutiny of the Royal Family and at a time when public deference has all but disappeared.

Charles, Mr Evans argues, is simply reverting to royal type. "Having a mistress is more of a job requirement that anything else. Nearly every king before him has had one. The problem is that the Royal Family has portrayed itself as the ideal family and made itself abide by middle-class values. The fact is that Charles and Diana were the fairy-tale. Camilla is the reality."

No daring, no imagination, just cycle paths

The Millennium Commission has made a big mistake in rejecting the Cardiff Opera House, says Peter Popham

When the Millennium comes around, there will be bicycle paths threading across the nation. Kew Gardens will have a new seed bed and South Wales's Llanelli coastline will have had a wash and brush up. But when people ask to be shown the monument we have built to bear witness to our faith in the future, to our cultural vigour and aesthetic discernment, we will take them to a building site on Cardiff Bay and tell them, here is where it died.

Yesterday the Millennium Commission decided that, while the seed bank deserved £1.5m, the comparatively trivial sum of £2.7m requested by Cardiff Opera House Trust to eliminate uncertainties surrounding the project - budgeted at £86.8m - was £2.7m too much. The trust was not going to get a penny.

Lord Crickhowell, chairman of the trust, will go to the Commission next week to argue his case. But unless it changes its mind, Britain's best chance of welcoming the new age with a gesture of daring and imagination to rival Sydney Opera House or the Pompidou Centre will probably have been lost for ever.

The architect of the project is a woman called Zaha Hadid. Though born in Baghdad and brought up all over the place, she is a British-made architect; the unique hothouse of London's Architectural Association brought her gift, like those of many brilliant foreign architects before her, to fruition. But like all too many of them, she has discovered that her talent is too rich for domestic consumption.

Her first real recognition came from abroad, when 12 years ago she won the competition, against 539 entries, to build a club on the Peak, the highest point on Hong Kong. The project was eventually shelved, but its beauty and blistering originality brought her worldwide fame. The works she has actually built are both in Germany. The closest she has come to executing a commission in Britain was earlier this year, when she designed an exhibition stand for the magazine *Blueprint*. Its lifespan was less than a fortnight.

It's not merely British timidity that keeps Zaha. From putting her stamp on our towns and cities. For hers is a very

particular talent: the most dashing exponent of deconstructionism, she is best known so far for the extraordinary paintings which accompany her competition entries, which depict landscapes that are shimmering alive, molten, controlled explosions. Her buildings are like that, too: harking back to the heroic interludes of Russian Suprematism and Italian Futurism, in the dawn of Modernism, when everything seemed possible, even the redemption of industrial society; before the tyranny of the Miesian right angle and the blank curtain wall got our cities in its grip.

Everything she designs is exhilarating. This is architecture conceived not as a slow accretion of certainties but as an eruption of planes and angles and colours and functions, a frozen nanosecond in the endless flux. She may be the most original architectural form maker since Le Corbusier or Frank Lloyd Wright.

This does not mean she is an architect for all seasons. While other imaginative architects like her former teacher Rem Koolhaas have succeeded in adapting their visions to the demands of down-to-earth briefs, it is probable that a Zaha-designed house would best suit one of her confirmed fans. The fire station she built in Weil am Rhein, Germany, was commissioned by the furniture makers Vitra, who have long been admirers of her work.

But the Opera House scheme at Cardiff was exactly the sort of project she was put on earth to realise; large in scale, stupendous in its impact, a raging bonfire of a building. Yet it would also have been a highly practical one: a brilliant project team was in the process of ensuring that in all technical specifications the building would have been superb.

The scheme has already seen off the timidity of the trustees (who, after Hadid was confirmed as winner, attempted to offer the job to less controversial runners-up), and the predictable hostility of the citizens. Now it has been condemned by a Commission which, by this decision, confirms the already widespread suspicion that it does not have the faintest idea what it is trying to do.

Shopping on the road to Damascus

Once more this year we have been told that Christmas sales are down. Hardly surprising. Christmas shopping having become such a merciless ordeal. Useless goods that children have been relentlessly programmed to expect are piled along aisles where distraught people struggle to remain clear-headed despite the brain-garbling cacophony of Yuletide muzak. The sales staff, mostly amateur at this time of year, are even less helpful than usual. Getting to the shops and home again, whether at the mercy of traffic jams, haphazard bus services or inadequate trains, adds to the utter joylessness of the experience.



GERMAINE GREER

Such considerations prompted me this year to try a new tack, to make the shopping an end in itself, to concentrate on enjoying the getting and let the giving take care of itself. I sought a place that was neither predominantly Christian, nor degraded by generations of consumerism, beset neither by avid traders nor by desperate spivs. I decided to do my Christmas shopping in Damascus.

It was, I know now, the right decision. The only fly in my spikenard was British Airways. At roughly the time when our flight should have touched down at Damascus, we were told that, as the airport was closed owing to fog, as the airport was overflying to Amman. As such inconveniences are only to be expected, you would think that the world's favourite airline would have a routine for dealing with them. Apparently not. For an hour we sat in an airport lounge, nothing to eat, nothing to drink, no toilets. After another

hour a willowy individual in BA uniform led the first- and business-class passengers away, we knew not whither. Eventually he returned and summoned to his elegant side all holders of passports issued by Arab nations. They left and he left with them.

The time ticked by. An hour later the rest of us were thrown out of the lounge as summarily as we had been thrown into it. Our passports were taken from us, and we were pushed out on to the pavement. A filthy minibus showed up; men trampled women and children to get into it, though they had as little idea where it might be going as the rest of us did. Eventually we found ourselves dumped at the airport hotel where, there being no rooms free, we were as welcome as stinking fish. Breakfast was an urn of lukewarm water, a jar of Nescafé and a basket of yesterday's croissants. When I got to Damascus I found that I had lost my hotel booking.

One of the mothers shepherding her two tired children through the arrogance and indifference of British Airways was Rana Kabbani, who took me under her wing, sorted out my hotel, took me to a sumptuous lunch at her parents' house and then, while both our heads were still reeling from sleeplessness, straight to the souk, to the street of spice and perfume sellers; and there I found, as I expected to find, that shopping in the traditional Orient is first and foremost a human encounter.

Where goods are not promoted, and packaging does not represent most of their value, the quality of the merchandise and the buyer's discrimination become the most important elements in the negotiation. The perfume hunter climbed up and down his tiny booth, bringing down bottle after bottle of richly coloured essences, reverently dabbing on his forearms, wrists, palms, elbows with the glass stoppers, until we were enveloped in a fragrant fog. We sat, we sniffed, we discussed, we bought, and amber for me, musk and lily for Rana. Such a collection of the souls of departed trees and flowers seemed to me beyond



price; we had spent, by Western computation, pennies.

There are souks and souks. You can be trampled, badgered, rooked and run over in a souk, but not in a Syrian souk. Though they may be busy, Syrian souks are not jostling. Where veiled ladies move majestically, unmindful of passing traffic, pushing

is clearly out of place. I never saw such a bewildering variety of veils. Short veils, long veils, big veils, small veils, veils pinned under the nose, veils pinned under the chin and veils not pinned at all, black veils, white veils, thick veils, veils that floated, veils that skimmed the ground. Many diverse communities live in and around Dam-

"We sat, we sniffed, we discussed" the pleasure of shopping in a Syrian souk

Sipa

ascus, and many more visit the city; I gave up speculating about who might be who. So unprovocative are the Damascenes that even in the mosques nobody was disturbed by my outlandish presence.

What they might have noticed is that I did my shopping with a tight western face; when I realised that mine was the only such face I concentrated on clearing my mind of the kind of diffuse tension that afflicts Occidentals. I began to make myself live in the now, enjoying my search for the perfect sugared almond, the wittiest belly-dancing dress, I drank the coriander coffee the merchants offered me, allowing the negotiation to mature pleasantly until each party was satisfied. The merchant, for his part, wanted to show me this for this price, that for that, to teach me about his wares, to see how I reacted. To close the sale too quickly was not only to disappoint him but to insult him in some subtle way.

Then he would even the score by giving me a gift. When I left the confiserie of Ghroubi, the lad who served me put a glazed aubergine, a sticky four-inch tourmaline stuffed with ground walnuts, in my hand, a sign that I had bought too much too fast. I took my punishment and discovered that aubergine is of course a fruit.

For five days I wandered among hawk-faced desert Arabs patiently trying shoe after shoe on their children's feet, brides peering at themselves in flyspecked mirrors to see how various fantastic coronets of paste and fake pearls became them, clutches of dour-faced ladies examining heaps of apparently identical pyjamas, past the maker of caparisons for horses, down the street of the dye-sellers, the blacksmiths, the butchers, through the fleamarket, amid the glittering booths of the goldsmiths. I made mistakes and I got things right. I hope my friends will like what I give them: if they don't, *mashallah*.

The gift that tells him you love him you hate him you miss him you want him.



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Swatch the Bear BT

obituaries / gazette

Sir Trenchard Cox

Trenchard Cox was the best-liked director of the Victoria and Albert Museum of the last half-century; a man whose wisdom, kindness and classless outlook inspired the widespread loyalty and support of the museum's staff. He was regarded with a respect bordering on devotion by all but the most truculent of his colleagues, and grew to occupy a place in their affections more usually reserved for a much-loved parent.

Cox was offered the job at the V & A in 1955 by David (later Viscount) Eccles, the then Minister of Education responsible for the appointment. At that time Director of the Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery, Cox was summoned to London for an interview, at which Eccles informed him he had been selected to keep the seat warm for John Pope-Hennessy. "I thought he might have put it a little more delicately," Cox later recalled, "and I decided to stay for 11 years."

Openly opposed only by Arthur Lane, the brilliant, but depressive, Keeper of Ceramics who was later to take his own life, Cox's appointment to succeed Sir Leigh Ashton was greeted with general relief at the museum. Ashton's increasing unfitness to carry out his duties had given serious cause for concern, and at the V & A was low. Cox, who had engineered a remarkable post-war renaissance at Birmingham, possessed precisely the right qualities to restore confidence.

He was the least self-regarding of men (Pope-Hennessy described him in his memoirs as "almost neurotically modest") and a stranger to hauteur. Entering the V & A one day shortly before taking up his post with an armful of books for his new office, Cox found his way barred by a burly museum attendant. "You can't bring those books in here, sir," the man was overheard to say. "It's quite all right, it's quite all right," Cox replied. "I shall be working here myself in two weeks' time."

His first objective on arriving

at the V & A set the tone of his directorship. With the help of his assistant Terence Hodgkinson, Cox resolved to learn the names of all his several hundred staff within three weeks. He did so successfully, and thereafter would greet everyone at the museum, whatever their position, warmly and by name. He slipped up only once, when he accidentally confused the identities of two typists who had temporarily exchanged places.

Charlotte Bonham Carter once remarked that "Trenchard would never miss a charwoman's funeral", and he was famous for the concern he showed for his staff and their families. Former colleagues recall Cox arriving with hampers to cheer them up when over-worked, arranging promotions they had not dared apply for, and always kind words of encouragement. During his directorship he never once failed to send a note complimenting a curator on the opening of a new exhibition.

Free of the prejudices that were commonplace among his generation, Cox was consistently even-handed with appointments. In the early 1960s, for the first time in the V & A's history, he saw it that a female research assistant was promoted Assistant Keeper, and, again for the first time, that a black warder was promoted Supervisor. Confirming his judgement, the same Supervisor subsequently went on to be appointed the museum's Chief Warder after Cox had retired.

An Old Etonian with a tentative, fastidious manner, a short step and extremely poor eyesight (he was a notoriously frightening motorist), Cox was not a difficult man to poke fun at. When talking animatedly in his squeaky, old-fashioned voice, he would wave his hands about and sway in a way reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's Dormouse, to whom he bore more than a passing resemblance. Such factors, together with his reluctance to reprove or discourage, also led some to consider Cox weak.

But perceptive contemporaries, including the unassuming Ellis Waterhouse, recognised Cox's determination and flair. At Birmingham, working with Dr Mary Woodall, Keeper of the Department of Art, Cox established the war-damaged Museum and Art Gallery as a leading national institution along fully metropolitan lines. He enjoyed excellent relations with the Birmingham City Corporation, and founded one of the most successful museum Friends organisations of the period.

Cox was also a connoisseur who had a good eye both for objects and their display. Acquisitions he made for the V & A included the superb jade wine-cup of Shah Jehan, generally considered to be the museum's most distinguished post-war Indian acquisition. And during Cox's directorship the museum's appearance and the various exhibitions staged there, notably the exhibition of *Opus Anglicanum* in the early 1960s, were of a consistently high standard.

Scrupulous in spending public money, Cox was nevertheless fortunate that the funding of museum purchases was less problematical in his day than today. For Birmingham he acquired five fine portraits by Arthur Devis, offered to the museum by an elderly local resident who had been left them by his father as an insurance against hard times. Of several independent valuations of the pictures Cox obtained, he offered their owner the highest figure in view of her straitened circumstances.

An able linguist and scholar, Cox graduated from Cambridge with a First Class degree in Modern Languages and went on to study art history at Berlin University under Adolf Goldschmidt. He always felt at home on the Continent, above all in France (of whose culinary traditions he was a keen student) and forged firm friendships with many of his museum colleagues overseas. His publications included well-regarded books on *Jehan Fouquet*,



Tentative: Cox on his appointment as Director of the V & A, 1956

Photograph: Hulton Deutsch

Native of Tours (1931) and *David Cox* (1947).

Trenchard Cox's greatest strength was without question his facility with people, and his greatest quality his moral weight. He was also a shrewd judge of character and ability, quick to recognise potential in others and to promote their achievements. Surviving members of his staff, many of whom went on to occupy important posts in the museum and academic world, recall him as a

great enabler, and as the single most formative influence in their professional lives.

In retirement Cox devoted much time and energy to the activities of St Martin-in-the-Fields. He served the parish as People's Warden from 1968 to 1979, and was staunch in his support of the social welfare work for which St Martin's is well known. Cox was devoted to his wife, Maisie, and greatly affected by her death in 1973.

George Ireland

George Trenchard Cox, museum director, born 31 July 1905; Assistant to the Keeper, the Wallace Collection 1932-39; seconded to Home Office 1940-44; Director, Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery 1944-55; CBE 1954; Director and Secretary, Victoria and Albert Museum 1956-66; K 1961; member, Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries 1967-77; Honorary Fellow, Royal Academy 1981; married 1935 Maisie Anderson (died 1973); died 21 December 1995.

Sir Colville Deverell

Colville Deverell had to face an exceptionally wide variety of problems and situations during his long career, first in government service, in a variety of postings in Africa and the Caribbean up until 1962, and then as the first Secretary-General of the International Planned Parenthood Federation.

Due to his tireless efforts at that time IPPF became firmly established as the largest international family planning organisation, many of the national family planning associations (particularly in Africa and Asia) having started through the encouragement of his evident fairness and integrity.

Educated at Portora School in Ulster, and Trinity College Dublin (for whom he played both cricket and tennis), he arrived in Kenya in 1931 as a district officer and spent his first seven years in the Colonial Service in some of the more remote districts which gave him his love and understanding of Africa.

In 1941 he was seconded to the Civil Affairs branch of East African Command, working throughout what is now Somalia and in Ethiopia, and reaching the rank of Colonel. His experience at this time convinced him that the way forward for the Somali peoples had to include political unity, as "Greater Somalia" as it was then called. But the decisions taken at the Italian peace treaty negotiations in 1946 rejected this concept, although Deverell (then on secondment to the War Office) worked hard to get it accepted, realising that this was an opportunity that would never recur.

On his return to Kenya in 1946 he was made Secretary of the important Authority for Post War Development and Reconstruction, and then in 1949 became Administrative Secretary. In this capacity he was primarily responsible for the planning and organisation of the visit to Kenya of Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh in 1952, which ended so tragically with the death of King George VI. That same year Deverell was transferred to Jamaica as Colonial Secretary, and for the next three years his astute judgement and extrovert nature (helped surely by his prowess as a cricketer) were invaluable to the Governor, Sir Hugh Foot, in negotiating the awkward and difficult path towards independence.

In 1955 Deverell was appointed Governor of the Windward Islands, where he had to cope with a new phenomenon in the shape of Hurricane Janet and the huge devastation it caused in Grenada. But this cruel experience stood him in good stead when he was transferred as Governor of Mauritius in 1957.

1959. For as soon as he arrived a very damaging cyclone hit the island and the first months of his administration were devoted almost entirely to repairing the consequences.

Deverell retired from the Colonial Service in 1962, but very soon his great ability to get on with people at all levels and of different backgrounds, and to reconcile conflicting views, was harnessed in the cause of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, of which he became the first Secretary-General in 1964. He went to India as chairman of the UN (FP) mission in 1965, the first of many such UN visits to different parts of the world. He retired from the IPPF in 1969.

Dev - he was never called anything else, having such impossible Christian names - dealt successfully with all the situations that faced him in the course of his career because he was a natural all-rounder with a splendid ability to persuade, cajole, oppose, instruct - whatever was needed. He was helped always by a ready wit



Dev: a natural all-rounder

and a dry, incisive sense of humour.

Dev married Margaret Wynne Willson in 1935, and she and their two younger sons survive him. Their eldest, John, a director of MTS, was killed in the helicopter crash on the Mull of Kintyre in June 1994.

Frank Lloyd

Colville Montgomery Deverell, colonial administrator, born 21 February 1907; Clerk to Executive and Legislative Councils 1938-39; Civil Affairs Branch, East Africa Command 1941-46; OBE 1946, GBE 1963; Secretary, Development and Reconstruction Authority, Kenya 1946-49; Administrative Secretary 1949-52; Colonial Secretary, Jamaica 1952-55; CVO 1953; CMG 1955, KCMG 1957; Governor and Commander-in-Chief, Windward Islands 1955-59; Governor and Commander-in-Chief, Mauritius 1959-62; Secretary-General, International Planned Parenthood Federation 1964-69; married 1935 Margaret Wynne Willson (two sons, one son deceased); died Wokingham 18 December 1995.

Professor Charles Fletcher

The son of Sir Walter Morley Fletcher, the first Secretary of the Medical Research Council, educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge, an oar in the victorious Cambridge boat of 1933: with his background, Charles Fletcher could have been assumed to be a pillar of the establishment. Far from it, Fletcher was a radical, free-thinker, who made major contributions to the medicine of his day. He will be remembered particularly for his pioneering work on the dust diseases of coalminers, his campaigning on the hazards of cigarette smoking and for emphasising the importance of communication in medicine.

He was born in 1911. After Eton and Cambridge, he studied Medicine at St Bartholomew's Hospital, graduating in 1937. He later worked with Professor Leslie Wills at the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford, where in 1941 he was the first doctor to inject penicillin, new-

ly prepared by Howard Florey and Ernst Chain, for the treatment of infection in a human subject. It was then that he diagnosed his own diabetes, necessitating lifelong injections of insulin, an affliction bravely borne for more than 50 years. There were moments when hypoglycaemia disturbed his spines, as when he told his wife that the end of the world was at hand. Her response was to ask him to take a lump of sugar before that happened.

When the Medical Research Council sought a clinical scientist to head their newly established Pneumoconiosis Research Unit in Cardiff, Sir Edward Mellanby, successor to Fletcher's father, had no hesitation in selecting Charles Fletcher. It was an inspired choice. Fletcher was able to establish the closest relationship with the trade unions and the community of miners in South Wales. He also proved to be a remarkable talent scout, recruiting such individuals as

the epidemiologist Archie Cochrane to his unit.

In 1952, Sir John McMichael invited Charles Fletcher to join his Department of Medicine at the Postgraduate Medical School at Hammersmith Hospital. It was not an entirely happy move. Fletcher's interest in epidemiology, the study of disease in the community rather than in single subjects in a hospital environment, was not given the support that he deserved. Nevertheless he was able to show conclusively that patients with chronic bronchitis would do better if they stopped smoking than if they were treated with expensive antibiotics.

It was at this time that he took a role in the anti-smoking campaign. Sir Richard Doll and Sir Austin Bradford Hill had shown that the modern epidemic of lung cancer was associated with the trade unions and the cigarette smoking, but it was Fletcher, with the support of Sir George Goddard at the Department of Health, who persuaded the Royal College of

Physicians to produce their epoch-making report in 1962 on the hazards of smoking. Fletcher himself was effectively the author of that report.

Tall and distinguished in appearance, and with thespian qualities, Charles Fletcher was perhaps a natural choice for television. It was he who, from 1958, collaborated with Richard Dimbleby in the production of the first major television series that dealt with medicine, *Your Life in Their Hands*. He was attacked by his professional colleagues for seeking personal publicity, something he would never have done, and his desire to see medicine not as a subject for general debate has in time been fully vindicated.

Fletcher retired in 1975, but continued his campaigning. He gave an inspiring Rocking Carling lecture on the importance of communication in medicine, emphasising how doctors should explain to their patients what they were up to.

He enjoyed his home in the Isle of Wight, where he was to suffer the first of the final cerebral episodes that were to end his life. He is survived by his wife Louisa, daughter of the first Baron Mottistone, and by his three children, one of whom, Susanna, is the wife of the Attorney-General, Sir Nicholas Lyell.

Christopher Booth

Charles Montague Fletcher, physician, born 5 June 1911; Director, MRC Pneumoconiosis Research Unit 1945-52; CBE 1952; Physician to Hammersmith Hospital 1952-76; Reader, London University at Royal Postgraduate Medical School 1952-73; Professor of Clinical Epidemiology 1973-76 (Emeritus); Secretary, MRC Committee on Bronchitis Research 1954-76; Secretary, Committee on Smoking and Health 1961-71; Chairman, Ash 1971-78; president, 1979-85; married 1941 Louisa Seely (one son, two daughters); died 15 December 1995.



Fletcher: medicine not as a secret garden but as a subject for general debate

Giorgio Fini, restaurateur, died Rome 18 December, aged 70. The first to sell pre-packaged pasta products (principally tortellini), he built his father's sausage factory up into an international food company, sold in 1989 to Kraft.

Andrew Lytle, writer, died Nashville, Tennessee 19 December, aged 92. Last surviving member of the "Agrarians", a US writers' movement of the 1930s which argued for a return to self-sufficient farming traditions. Author of *The Long Night* (1936) and *The Velvet Horn* (1957).

Births, Marriages & Deaths

DEATHS

FRANKLIN: Dr Owen Gottlieb, GP and artist, died peacefully, surrounded by his family, on December 1995, at University College Hospital, aged 62 years, having bravely fought cancer for 3½ years. Dearly missed by his wife, Dorothy, his sons, David and John, his daughters, Julia and Tina, his grandchildren, Abe, Mattia, brothers Roger and Joe, sister Nina, cousin Angela and many other family and friends. Funeral service to be held at Golders Green Crematorium (West Chapel), Hove Lane, London NW11 on Friday 29 December at 1pm. Instead of flowers, the family would appreciate donations to the Hodgkin's Disease and Lymphoma Association, PO Box 375, Haddenham, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP17 8JJ (Registered charity 294642).

IN MEMORIAM

PARIKIAN: In loving memory of Marjorie Parikian who died on Christmas Eve, 1987.

Announcements for Gazette BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS (Births, Adoptions, Marriages, Deaths, Memorial services, Wedding announcements, etc.) must be sent in writing to the Gazette Editor, The Independent, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 3DL, telephoned on 0171-235 2111 or faxed on 0171-235 2110, and are charged at £6.50 a line (VAT extra).

Changing of the Guard

TODAY The Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment passes the Queen's Life Guard at Horse Guards, Whitehall, 11am. The Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment passes the Queen's Life Guard at Horse Guards, Whitehall, 11am. The Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment passes the Queen's Life Guard at Horse Guards, Whitehall, 11am.

Forthcoming marriages

Miss J. C. C. Allenby and **Mr R. E. Ryan**. The engagement is announced between Julie, younger daughter of John and Genie Allenby, of Frensham, and Robert, elder son of Peter Ryan, of St Albans, and Elizabeth Cooper, of Cardiff.

23 December

BIRTHDAYS Emperor Akihito of Japan, 62; Queen Silvia of Sweden, 52; Lord Bascourt, former Head of the Home Civil Service, 73; Sir Franklin Berman, legal adviser, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 56; Mrs Christine Bicknell, former chairman, CDSB, 76; Sir Norman Biggs, banker, 88; Lord Blake, former editor, *Dictionary of National Biography*, 79; Vice-Admiral Sir Stephen Carrill, 93; Mr David Davis MP, Minister for the European Union, 47; Mr Peter Davis, former chairman, Reed International plc, 54; Mr Maurice Denham, actor, 86; Mr John Guinness, chairman, British Nuclear Fuels, 60; Mr Yusuf Karsa, portrait photographer, 87; Mr Graham Kelly, chief executive, the Football Association, 50; Miss Belinda Lang, actress, 42; Mr Christopher Lawrence, silversmith, 59; Sir Roger Neville, former chief executive, Sun Alliance, 64; Miss Joan Quennell, former MP, 72; Herr Helmut Schmidt, former Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, 77; The Rev Christopher Turner, former Headmaster, Dean Close and Stow

Schools, 66; Mr Rayner Urwin, chairman, Urwin Enterprises, 68; Mrs Ursula Urwin, 68; Jean-François Champollion, Egyptologist and decipherer of the Rosetta Stone, 1790; Joseph Arthur, first Baron Rank, miller and film magnate, 1888; David on this day, Anthony Herman Gerard, aircraft designer, 1939; Edward Frederick Lindley Wood, first Earl of Halifax, Viceroy of India, 1899; On this day: *HMS Bounty*, commanded by William Bligh, sailed from Spithead for the South Seas, 1789; the Aldwych Theatre, London, opened, 1905.

Christmas Eve

BIRTHDAYS Mr Alistair Baillie, former diplomat, 63; Mrs Maï Barnes, former managing director, Woolworths, 51; Mr John Barron, actor, 75; Professor Anthony Clare, psychiatrist, 53; Sir Colin Cowdrey, consultant, Barclays Bank, and former cricketer, 63; Sir Gerald Elliot, former chairman, Christian Salvesen, 72; Mr Jeremy Hindley, horse-racing trainer, 52; Dame Joan Killeher, former director, WRAC, 80; Sir Ivan Lawrence QC, MP, 59; Dr John Mann, MP, 55; Miss Sony Matthews, fashion editor, 1832; Howard Richard Hughes, millionaire and redoubt, 1905; Ava Lavina Gardner (Lucy Johnson), actress, 1922. Died on this day: William Makepeace Thackeray, novelist, 1863; Peter Lawford, actor, 1984; John James O'Connor, playwright and actor, 1984. On this day: Giuseppe Verdi's opera, *Aida* was performed for the first time, Cairo, 1871; the *Apollo 8* spacecraft orbited the moon and sent back a Christmas message, 1968.

Christmas Day

BIRTHDAYS Princess Alexandra, 59; Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester, 94; Lord Apsan, author, 79; Miss Sheila Browne, former principal, Newnham College, Cambridge, 71; Professor Kenneth Calman, chief medical officer, Department of Health, 54; Mr Quentin Crisp, writer, 87; Professor Christobel Frayling, Professor, Royal College of Art, 48; Lord Grade, chairman, the Grade Company, 89; The Right Rev Noel Jones, Bishop of Sodor and Man, 63; Miss Annie Lennox, singer, 41; Professor Philip Love, Vice-Chancellor, Liverpool University, 56; Mr Tony Martin, singer and actor, 82; Sir Peter Matthews, former Chief Constable of Surrey, 78; Mr Ismail Merchant, film producer, 54; Professor Phyllida Purdie, Professor of Social Work, Bristol University, 65; Mr John Sharnam, High Commissioner to the Seychelles, 58; Lord Sheppard of Digme, chairman, Grand Metropolitan, 63; Miss Sissy Spacek, actress, 46; Mr Nigel Stanger-Smith, sports commentator, 51; Sir Noel Stockdale, life president of the ASDA group, 75; The Right Rev Benjamin Vaughan, former Bishop of Swansea and Brecon, 78; Sir Christopher Wiles, chief executive of Water Building Group, 56. Born on this day: Sir Isaac Newton, mathematician, physicist and astronomer, 1642; Humphrey DeForest Bogart, actor, 1899; Bob Calloway, jazz singer and bandleader, 1907. Died on this day: W.C. Fields (William Claude Dukenfield), comedian, 1946; Sir Charles Spencer Chaplin, comedian and film producer, 1977; Joan Miró, artist, 1983. On this day: William I, "the Conqueror", was crowned in Westminster Abbey, 1066; the *Mayflower* arrived at Plymouth Rock, Massachusetts, 1620; the first Christmas tree was put up at Queen's Lodge, Windsor, by Queen Charlotte, 1800.

God and Mary and a crisis of intimacy

At Christmas we celebrate the generosity of God and the humanity of the child. It threatens to become kitsch, but two Christmas children might help to reveal a less sentimental perspective on the Christmas story.

The first Christmas child's mother is Kathleen Loughlin, who recently made a documentary film in Bosnia. She was burdened with a number of roles - age girl reporter, Methodist minister, American. She was also pregnant and her child will be born, God willing, around Christmas. Kathleen's reports from Maglaj and Gorazd have unveiled the domestic horrors of ethnic conflict, where neighbours turn into murderers. She was perhaps a touch irresponsible. Certainly her mother thought so. It may seem thoughtless to make others anxious about your fitness to duck and run. But her delicate condition enabled other women to share desperately indelible stories about their lives.

There is something absolute about the right to give birth in safety and something deeply evil about the denial of that right. The fleeing, pregnant woman is a shameful image of our civilisation. The image of God given life, thankfully shared, is one of its glories.

Our second child was born in London, at Christmas, six years ago. His name is Joshua. Last year his father dutifully told him the Christmas tale. In this story, you will recall, God is Jesus's father and Joseph is Mary's husband. Josh saw the whole picture straight away and asked: "Were God and Mary divorced, then?"

That is a pretty sharp reflection on the Western crisis of intimacy. Peace in Bosnia might in principle be enforced by 60,000 troops. It is hard to imagine who

Meanings of Christmas

The Rev John Kennedy, Secretary of the Division of Social Responsibility of the Methodist Church, opens our Christmas series with a salutary reflection on modern marriage.

We might airlift into our own painful domestic battleground. Probably not the royal family. They've got the uniforms, but are clearly walking wounded. A fleeing pregnant woman is a terrifying European Ghost of Christmas Past. The Ghost of the present Christmas is, of course, the Princess of Wales.

In the last 50 years we have endured a mass experiment in the recasting of intimate life on a pattern of coerced mutuality and personal fulfilment. One day we may learn to live like this, but not yet. The Holy Family has been given a new stereotype - the Redundant Male, the Struggling Single Mum, the self-obsessed Wild Child. The traditional grouping no longer offers a haven in a heartless world - it is often where the pain is.

The remedies on offer from Church and State are of little help. The fixed positions of the churches are collapsing daily. The Government's back-to-basics appeal to family values did recognise that public pol-

icy alone cannot remoralise society. But the enterprise finally expired this week in farce. David Ashby MP, one of the spear-carriers in that crusade, has effectively been designated homosexual with a lot of help from his wife. Joe Orton could not have been more cruelly funny.

The Intimacy Wars look certain to shape our future as much as shooting wars have deformed our past. So how to make peace with ourselves? Perhaps we should first acknowledge the fraught nature of the enterprise that we are launched upon. One of Kathleen Loughlin's Bosnian pieces was called "Naming the Loss". What we in the West have lost is the empire of marriage. It has dissolved into a federal republic of intimacy whose borders are contested and many of its people stateless. It is much too early to draft a peace plan.

Meanwhile, refugees flood in from the old empire - politicians, princess and clergy. In all this, a refashioned perception of the Holy Family can clarify rather than confuse. That family is so strange, so alien to our conventional expectations of the family, that there is room for all of us to find shelter within its ambiguities.

Kathleen's child and Josh will grow up in a world of intimacy quite different to the one their grandparents knew. That world is in the process of radical reshaping. We might dare to believe that God is engaged with us in that. We might imagine there is room within the human family for all kinds of relationship, and that such a relaxed generosity might both please God and sustain marriage. We might risk the conviction that God is the creator of our intimate lives, that in the very oddity of his coming among us he is truly Emmanuel, God With Us.



The threat now is that a rundown in excess inventories will bring the economy shuddering to a standstill in the first few months of 1996

Bears growl as pause for growth turns nasty

As the markets pack up for Christmas, City economists have been sending unseasonal greetings for the new year. Analysts have been vying with one another for the most bearish forecast of growth in 1996.

Ten days ago, the average independent prediction for growth in 1996 was 2.4 per cent, down from 2.7 per cent in November. The cascade of downward revisions which started when Goldman Sachs cut its forecast to 1.7 per cent continues. James Capel, one of the more bullish houses, has just come down from 3 to 2.5 per cent. Morgan Stanley now expects 2.2 per cent.

The "growth pause" that started in the spring is turning nasty. What little expansion there was in the second and third quarters – equivalent to little more than half the 2.5 per cent underlying rate of growth in the economy – was largely accounted for by a big build-up in stocks. The threat now is that a rundown in excess inventories will bring the economy shuddering to a standstill in the first few months of 1996. Indeed the fall in imports from non-EU countries in November – concentrated in semi-manufactures – suggested that this process has already begun.

The new City consensus is that the economy will bounce back after this inventory correction. As James Capel puts it: "1996: spring chill, summer thaw." The main motor of expansion is expected to be consumer spending, as consumers splash out from rising real incomes lifted by tax cuts. The Treasury expects an additional boost from a rundown in savings.

Consumers did raid their piggybanks in the third quarter, but taking the first nine months of 1995 as a whole, the ratio of personal savings to disposable income has remained unchanged. For a sustained fall in the savings ratio to occur, there will have to be a real pick-up in confidence.

There are some signs that this is occurring. For example, the green shoots of a housing market recovery, the rise in purchases of vehicles in November. However, there is a real danger that the inventory correction could build on itself. Confidence would be hit hard if manufacturers were to lay off workers while meeting demand from stocks. Even if they don't, it is hard to envisage consumers really coming out of their shells while indebtedness remains so high and worries about job insecurity persist.

The worldwide background is hardly encouraging. Although exports picked up sharply in November to countries outside the EU, there is a strong likelihood that exports to the EU – for which the last information was for September – have been suffering. With the German economy also undergoing an inventory correction and the French economy afflicted by the effects of the strikes, the immediate prospects for exports to two of our main trading partners look bleak. The Treasury's forecast of overall growth in exports of just over 7 per cent in 1996 – this after less than 6 per cent in the current year – looks as optimistic as its prediction of 3.5 per cent growth in consumer expenditure.

The mean error in forecasting GDP a year ahead is at least 1 per cent. Growth could surprise on the upside – but at this stage it looks more likely to disappoint on the downside. Expect more cuts in base rates to warm up a rapidly chilling economy and the holy grail of a balanced budget to be postponed yet again, this time into the next millennium.

BT's rebellion is fraught with risks

When enough is enough, the grand gesture – rebellion and the barricades – is always a tempting one. The trouble with such an approach, however, is that once the forces of revolution are unleashed, the outcome is never predictable: often it is to the disadvantage of the original protagonists. The risk to British Telecom in deciding to take on the regulator is precisely this.

To come out fighting may give the management an initial flush of euphoria and satisfaction after all these years of regulatory oppression, but it is really the right approach from the shareholders' point of view?

By deciding to test the regulator's demands before the Monopolies and Mergers Commission (the reference has not been made yet but it is only a matter of time), BT is plainly betting that the awful precedent of British Gas will not be repeated.

In that case the grand old man of monopolies took on the regulator before the MMC and ended up with an even worse deal than the one it chose to fight. It was the beginning of the end for British Gas. British Telecom too seems to want to take on the regulator on all fronts.

Though its case may be a more powerful one than that of British Gas, this is a high-risk strategy. Breaking up British Telecom is an option which has always had plenty of intellectual support.

Geest chief avoids a slip-up

You have to hand it to David Sugden, chief executive of Geest. After skidding on every banana skin in sight over the past four years, he has kept his poise when it really mattered. Setting up a Dutch auction for his company's core plantation and import business ensured a better than expected price and, while shareholders' backs were turned, he has slipped out the back door with a £420,000 pay-off.

Not a bad deal for overseeing a slump in Geest's share price from a high of 479p only two years ago, to just 153p before yesterday's deal effectively unveiled a big For Sale sign over the rump convenience food business. They closed 39p higher at 192p as the market tried to decide which of Unigate, Northern Foods or Hillsdown would pounce first on Geest's small but profitable

food operation and its £60m cash pile. Mr Sugden may not have had much luck growing bananas, but he plainly plays a cool hand of corporate poker. Noboa, the Ecuadorian group behind the Bonita brand, was used to handsome effect in boosting the price well above the £75m touted in the papers even a few weeks ago. At £92m for the core business (excluding the £55m Fyffes is paying for two chartered ships), shareholders will probably feel he has belatedly earned his golden handshake.

So yes, Geest really will have no bananas, bringing to a close a 40 year trading link with the Windward Islands, a curious Commonwealth anachronism that outlasted all Britain's other agricultural links with its former colonies. The good news is that bananas will continue to cost next to nothing in the supermarkets – over-supply from the more efficient suppliers in the dollar-bloc of Latin America will ensure that Fyffes will have to squeeze all the available economies of scale to make a decent return on its investment. The price paid of only seven times earnings in a "normal" year, looks attractive only on the assumption that a disease-free, hurricane-free year is any more likely than the Black Saturday-blighted, tropical storm-swept seasons that have dogged Geest since it took the rash decision to move back up the production chain from its shipping roots into production. Fyffes' unchanged share price yesterday confirmed which company the market believes has struck the better deal.

YTT schedule shake-up alarms watchdog

MATHEW HORSMAN
Media Editor

Radical changes to the schedules of Yorkshire Television and Tyne Tees, proposed by TV executive Bruce Gyngell, have provoked grave concerns at the Independent Television Commission.

In an unusual move, the ITC said yesterday that it had "doubts whether the new programmes proposed would improve the services to the satisfaction of viewers." But rather than insist the plans not go ahead, the commission has decided to monitor the new schedule until the end of March 1996 before making a final decision on whether the changes will be allowed.

The ITC has the right to interfere when ITV licence holders change their programming, to ensure that all services are in accordance with the terms of the licences it grants to television companies.

Mr Gyngell, who has made waves since he joined as managing director of Yorkshire

Tyne Tees earlier this year, has moved to reduce costs and to revamp the regional programming schedule.

At the heart of his new approach is the incorporation of regional segments within magazine-style programming, in place of regularly scheduled regional programmes.

While the ITC recognises that the change will mean more regional programming in peak viewing hours, there is concern that the licence-holders' commitment to non-news regional material may be waning.

The ITC has also pointed to Mr Gyngell's intention of making greater use of co-productions, which the commission fears might reduce the range and number of independent production companies supplying the two channels.

The outspoken Mr Gyngell, known for his pink shirts and his unorthodox management style, helped turn TV-am into one of the most successful franchises in the country.

Controversially, his company lost the licence to what is now

GMTV in 1992, prompting former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to send a letter expressing her disappointment.

Mr Gyngell spent the past three years in Australia with Kerry Packer's Nine Network, returning to join YTT in May.

YTT insiders say his management style has shaken up the group, and has provoked the departure of middle-level executives. Mr Gyngell, with the equally outspoken YTT chairman, Ward Thomas, considers that the ITV television system needs big changes – not least a reform of its fragmented regional character.

Already, YTT has joined forces with Granada and London Weekend Television, to jointly sell their programmes abroad.

Their desire to see a more integrated ITV sector could come at the expense of YTT's own independence, however, as Granada and MAJ, Lord Hollick's media and financial services company, have 15 per cent stakes in YTT and could launch takeover bids. Under the Gov-



Making waves: Bruce Gyngell (left) when TV-am lost its licence in 1992

ernment's intended relaxation of ownership restrictions, likely to be in place by the end of next year, either company could own YTT's two licences outright.

The ITC is believed to be concerned that the regional mandate of ITV companies be safeguarded, despite the likely consolidation.

Its decision to put Mr Gyngell's new plans on notice was seen last night as a warning shot to all ITV companies that the regional nature of the commercial television industry is to be maintained.

IN BRIEF

Exxon man takes over at Nuclear Fuels

British Nuclear Fuels has appointed John Taylor, currently a vice-president of Exxon Chemical Europe, as chief executive of the state-owned company. Mr Taylor succeeds Neville Chamberlain, who is to become deputy chairman. The changes are intended to help BNFL further its drive into the international marketplace, which is an increasingly important part of its strategy. The company also faces radical changes in the UK with the forthcoming privatisation of its biggest customers, Nuclear Electric and Scottish Nuclear, which are being merged to form British Energy.

French deal for Barclays

Barclays is to sell part of its French property loan portfolio to an investor consortium led by Lehman Brothers for £870m (£114m). The portfolio includes 193 property loans for office and housing developments and properties mainly in the Paris area.

Ashbourne leases with Abbey Life

Ashbourne agreed a sale and leaseback of five of its nursing homes with Abbey Life for a net consideration of £16.8m cash. The leases will be for 35 years with rent reviews every five years. The aggregate initial amount of annual rent payable will be about £1.65m.

Electrolux sells Spanish unit

Electrolux of Sweden has sold its Spanish cooker manufacturing unit, Castellbisbal, to IAR Group of Italy. The sale, for an undisclosed sum, will have no negative effect on 1995 results, as the provisions were already made in 1994 accounts. The unit has 367 employees, making mainly low-end gas cookers for the domestic market. Electrolux said that the profitability of the unit had been "unsatisfactory".

LEP close to wind-up with last business sale

MAGNUS GRIMOND

LEP, the heavily indebted transport group, took the final steps towards winding itself up yesterday after it announced the sale of its only remaining business to management. The sale, following the last-minute withdrawal of the freight group NCF from the bidding, ends nearly four years during which LEP has been operating under a lifeline from its banks.

The business concerned, LEP International, one of the top six freight forwarding firms in the world, has gone to management for £1, along with the transfer of debts amounting to around £30m. The deal was rushed through following the collapse on Wednesday of talks with NCF, originally unveiled in October. The transport group had been given exclusive rights in the negotiations.

David James, the company doctor who has run LEP since 1992, blamed the failure of the discussions on NCF's underestimation of the complexity of the freight forwarding business, which employs 7,000 people in 31 countries. However, there are suspicions elsewhere that Gerry Murphy, the NCF chief

executive, may be finding deeper problems at the group than he expected when he arrived in June. NCF has been suffering badly from highly competitive markets and earlier this month it stunned the City with a 25 per cent slump in operating profits and a £35m restructuring provision.

Mr Murphy told staff yesterday: "Whilst the strategic and commercial rationale for the deal remained attractive and we had developed an excellent working relationship with the management of LEP International, it has not been possible to conclude an agreement which would have been in the overall interests of NCF's shareholders." He added that the company remained committed to offering customers international logistical solutions and "will be actively looking for other ways of doing this".

The sale means that LEP's parent company, LEP Group, has cut its outstanding indebtedness to 36 bank creditors led by NatWest from £646m in 1992 to an eventual figure likely to be around £110m. With Barclays and Lloyds, NatWest own 38 per cent of the debt. There is not expected to be

any return to shareholders. Shares in the company were suspended at 3p in June, when the plans to sell the remaining businesses were announced. LEP has already completed the disposal of its US electronic security business, National Guardian Corporation, for a figure thought to be in excess of \$300m. It said yesterday it would cancel its Stock Exchange listing from 29 December and move to call for a members' voluntary liquidation soon after.

Ironically, the new owners of LEP International are likely to include some or all of the 7,000 staff in an employee ownership scheme similar to the one adopted by NCF when it was privatised in 1982. Owing to the low level of capital involved, no outside financiers are involved in the management buy-out, which is being led by Jack Wasp, chief executive for the past four years.

Turnover is currently running at around £1.2m and profit before exceptional items in the year to December 1993, the latest period for which accounts are available, were £6.5m. Net assets, including the bank debt, were £68.2m.

Land buys remaining 50% of Broadgate

JOHN SHEPHERD

British Land has exchanged contracts to buy the outstanding 50 per cent stake in Broadgate Properties, the prestigious 1.5 million sq ft office development in the heart of the City of London, for £121.5m.

Final completion of the deal, which is conditional on approval from British Land shareholders, is expected by the middle of next month.

The Broadgate development is almost fully let. The property assets of Broadgate Properties were valued at £1.04bn on an open-market value on 15 December.

The company said: "The acquisition will allow us to consolidate the interests in the Broadgate and Ludgate estates, and to extract significant value from these outstanding office developments, where there are good prospects for long-term rental and capital growth."

It added that it also planned to refinance the existing £800m of bank borrowings of Broadgate Properties on "significantly improved terms". British Land shares rose 1p to 370p after the announcement.

In the year to 30 June 1995, Broadgate Properties reported a pre-tax loss of £14.4m after charging exceptional items of £10.6m.

The loss compared with a profit in 1994 of £28.8m, after including an exceptional gain of £29.9m.

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market report/shares

Speculators plump for Ladbroke as a stocking-filler

DATA BANK

FT-SE 100
3,658.3 + 25.0

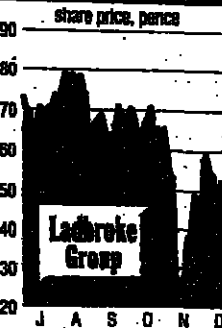
FT-SE 250
3,985.4 + 18.1

FT-SE 350
1,815.1 + 11.6

SEAQ VOLUME
392.8m shares,
13,836 bargains

Gifts Index
95.42 + 0.04

SHARE SPOTLIGHT



Speculators, wondering whether any takeover presents were still taking away, again alighted on Ladbroke, the betting and hotel group, as the market went through the motions of completing a half-day's pre-Christmas trading.

In a record-breaking year for takeovers - worth £70bn at the last count - the temptation to find another winner enlivened what, by tradition, is an uneventful session.

Ladbroke has been a late runner in the market's takeover stakes. It came to the fore early this month when rumours flowed that Bass, the brewing and hotel giant, was preparing to strike.

Bass is still in the frame but it is another brewer, Whitbread, that has taken up the running. It splashed out £180m in August for 16 UK Marriott Hotels and is thought to be anxious to increase its hotel portfolio.

Ladbroke, through its Hilton chain, would provide an international spread, something dear to the heart of any ambitious hotelier. Whitbread could, however, run into problems reconciling the Marriott and Hilton set-ups.

Market punters are betting on Whitbread being unable to resist the opportunity of becoming a powerful international force and overcoming any branding difficulties.

With the market chatter revolving around Ladbroke's Hilton connections there has been little gossip about its betting operations. However, Whitbread's high street presence, Pizza Hut and Threshers, could indicate it would be happy to be a bookie.

The Ladbroke rumour has been good for the group's shares. Their recent strength kept them in the FT-SE 100 index. They recovered an early fall yesterday to close 4p higher at 152p, capitalising the company at £1.77bn. A warning that year's profits would be lower had driven them to 123p before the rumour mill came to their rescue.



MARKET REPORT

DEREK PAIN

Stock market reporter of the year

At 152p, capitalising the company at £1.77bn. A warning that year's profits would be lower had driven them to 123p before the rumour mill came to their rescue.

Bass rose 18p to 703p and Whitbread 4p to 664p. The rest of the market put on a festive display with Footsie finishing with a 25-point flourish at 3,658.3. Hopes continue that it will stretch beyond its current peak, 3,680.4, next week.

Talk of a share buy-back brightened PowerGen, up 10p at 534p. British Aerospace, 6p higher at 785p, remained firm on Orange flotation prospects and talk of a GEC as-

sult. GEC gained 4.5p to 343p.

British Gas slipped 1.5p to 256p. The controversial chief executive, Cedric Brown, through dividend reinvestment, has nudged up his shareholding to 31.691 shares.

Royal Bank of Scotland improved 5p to 573p. It has increased its influence in Banco Santander to 24 per cent. The Spanish bank has 9.89 per cent of Royal Bank.

Geest, on its banana windfall, jumped 39p to 192p and Hillside managed a 6p advance to 166p. BTR shaded to 317.5p; Salomon Brothers completed an 8.68 million trade at 316p.

Action continued among the bio-buses. BS Biomedica, raising £3.82m through a placing and open offer at 90p, rose a further 22p to 130p. Electrophoresis put on 20p to 172p after linking with a Ministry of Agriculture agency to research diagnosis of BSE.

Hartons, the plastics group, firmed to 8.25p as Schuitersveld made a mandatory offer at 8.5p. The Dutch group picked up most of the shares on offer in a cash-raising exercise, lifting its stake to 53.1 per cent.

Crown Products, the games group that returned from suspension on Wednesday after putting through two acquisitions, said it has raised £100,000 by issuing shares at 50p. The price stood at 53p.

OIS International Inspection held at 25p after rejecting the Abbot offer; Bruncliffe Aggregates drew strength from Redland's bid for Ennemeix,

gaining 3p to 22p. Raglan Property, seeking authority to indulge in a share buy-back, gained 2.5p to 20p. Lifehomes Assured Tenancies, a former Business Expansion Scheme residential property group, jumped 10p to 95p following the agreed 100p cash offer from Cosmopolitan Trade Ventures.

Reunion Mining suffered from a poorly received launch, falling 3p to 66p against Thursday's 80p opening.

Pex, a textile group, slipped 0.5p to 8.5p as the signalled £2.5m cash-raising exercise was mounted. Uniwear, a Belgian group run by Italian aristocrat Andrea Cattaneo Della Volta, is pumping £2m into the business and could end up with 44.4 per cent. Shares are being sold at 4.375p.

King & Shaxson, the discount house owning stockbrokers Greig Middleton and Allied Provincial, held at 141p.

TAKING STOCK

High-flying ETG, the old British Technology Group which came to market in July at 225p, could reach 1,500p in a year's time, Dr Erling Refsum of Yamaichi believes. The shares are 1,025p. With a portfolio of 9,000 patents relating to 1,300 inventions which have so far generated 470 licences, ETG is about "to enter a decade of dramatically increasing cash flow and profitability". Adjusting for obvious risks involved in the group's spread of developments, Dr Refsum reckons the underlying market capitalisation could be £320m or even an astonishing £2.8bn. Current value is £180m.

Cairn Energy raised £5m placing shares through Société Générale Strains Turnbull. The cash will go towards developing its new Bangladesh field and other projects. The shares are 117p.

Bank	Price	Bank	Price
Barclays	142.00	HSBC	142.00
Bank of America	142.00	London & Lancashire	142.00
Bank of China	142.00	Midland	142.00
Bank of India	142.00	Natwest	142.00
Bank of Japan	142.00	Paragon	142.00
Bank of Korea	142.00	Prudential	142.00
Bank of Malaysia	142.00	Share	142.00
Bank of Mongolia	142.00	Standard	142.00
Bank of New Zealand	142.00	Union	142.00
Bank of Oman	142.00	Windsor	142.00
Bank of Pakistan	142.00		
Bank of Portugal	142.00		
Bank of Romania	142.00		
Bank of Russia	142.00		
Bank of Saudi Arabia	142.00		
Bank of Singapore	142.00		
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Saints face ultimate test of faith

Steve Bale discovers the secret of Northampton's success this season as they prepare to meet Bath in the Pilkington Cup today



It says everything about the swathe Northampton have this season easily cut through English rugby union's Second Division that this afternoon's Pilkington Cup tie at Bath will tell them more about themselves than their 10 league games put together.

A glance at the figures reveals that Northampton are in a league of their own as far as National League Two is concerned: 10 straight wins at an average of 53-12 for a points differential of 402, more than 300 better than the next best.

The Saints have been playing divine rugby, fit to grace the First Division, and it is their misfortune that Bath, who happen to be the only other side in the national leagues with a 10-from-10 record, have been playing rugby fit to grace the top of the First Division.

That Northampton are in the Second Division at all is not readily explicable, beyond the obvious truth that as they finished bottom last season they deserved to go down whatever the purported quality of the players at their disposal. Equally, it is not readily explicable why they would be playing this sort of rugby now if they, rather than West Hartlepool and Harlequins, had somehow hung on last April.

"I would still rather it hadn't happened," Ian McGeechan, their coaching director, said. "But it's fair to say there would have been different pressures on us and different skills against us in the First Division and quite

clearly a different percentage of possession we could use."

"The commitment we made to each other was that winning would not be enough in the Second Division. We had to play like a top First Division side against Second Division opposition. We've probably surprised ourselves by how it's worked out, at how well we've done playing the game at the fastest possible pace. But going to Bath is as big an imponderable as how our rugby would work in the league, because we haven't been having to prove ourselves week-in week-out."

McGeechan is the former Scotland and Lions player and coach who discovered the only way was down when he took on the job at Franklin's Gardens at a time of last season when his new charges were already sliding towards the Second Division. After the way this famous but faded club had dragged itself out of oblivion in the late Eighties, it was a bitter legacy.

Underlying Northampton's problems was that the departure of Barrie Corless, their first coaching director, and the ex-All Black captain Wayne Shelford had left a void that was left unfilled until McGeechan's arrival. The relationship between Glenn Ross, the New Zealand coach who Shelford had been instrumental in bringing to coach the Saints, and the players deteriorated and by last season a team who had been challenging for honours in the early Nineties had lost both spirit and purpose.

Perhaps it needed the catharsis of relegation. Not only are



Light training: Ian McGeechan warms to the task of preparing Northampton to face the First Division leaders, Bath, today

Photograph: Peter Jay

Northampton on their way back to the First Division at the first attempt, they now have a big-money backer and have voted themselves into a limited company in readiness for the first blast of club professionalism. They are as well prepared as any club for the dam-burst that will come with the end of the Rugby Union's moratorium in May.

For this hectic progression from failure to success, Northampton owe their great-

est debt to Tim Rodber, the captain who took them down and is about to take them up again: a sort of Grand Old Duke of York in reverse. The most vital service he rendered was in persuading the members of last season's side to stay loyal, even though it can now be seen that the inevitably poorer standard of rugby has done nothing for his England prospects.

Not that others could complain. Martin Bayfield withstood Harlequins' blandish-

ments and kept his England place alongside Rodber. Paul Grayson and Matthew Dawson have formed a new England half-back partnership despite - or should that be because of - playing for Northampton.

Even so, Rodber is probably right to lay much of the blame for his unwelcome pallid performances against South Africa and Western Samoa at the door of Second Division rugby, however noble Northampton's intention may be to rise above this

self-inflicted milieu. "Going from the Second Division to international rugby has been tough for me," he said.

"But the loyalty factor was something I felt very strongly about. I had always played for Northampton and had no desire to play anywhere else. I canvassed everyone else, and everyone else was of the same opinion. So we've stuck together and been able to develop the style of rugby we wanted, iron out the wrinkles

as it were - which we would not have been able to do in the First Division."

The notion of personal sacrifice in the interests of a wider cause comes well from a serving officer. But Li Rodber of the Green Howards, the oldest unamalgamated regiment in the army, knows all too well that the price could yet be his England back-row place - hence the magnitude of today's match, for Rodber personally, every bit as much as his company of Saints.

Nevill to seek out potential

Hockey
BILL COLWILL

The search for potential Sean Kerlys will get under way during the coming week with the junior territorial and divisional tournaments in Sheffield and Bristol.

The best place to be will be the Aurora Club, Sheffield, for the women's under-21 event starting on Thursday. With England committed to the Under-21 European Cup in Cardiff in August, the national coach, Mary Nevill, will be keen to see what is in the locker. "It is a very important tournament. Everyone in contention for places for Cardiff will be there and it will be the last chance we have to see all the contenders on a level base in a competitive tournament situation."

Nevill also made it clear that another priority in Sheffield will be to have an early look at replacements - in view of the Junior World Cup in Seoul in 1997 - for those players who will be over age after Cardiff.

A tall order for Singleton

Basketball
DUNCAN HOOPER

Chester Jets have signed the 6ft 7in American Billy Singleton in an attempt to climb out of the Budweiser League's re-election places. The former Birmingham import makes his debut away to Thames Valley Tigers tonight.

Despite last month reaching the League Trophy quarter-finals for the first time and having the league's leading scorer in American Wayne Boone, Chester have lost their last 11 games and slipped back into the bottom three.

Chester's slide worsened when the 6ft 9in former England veteran Dave Gardner left to join Manchester Giants. Chester coach Mike Burton said: "The biggest player on the court for us is only 6ft 4in, and that doesn't help in this league."

Chester have released the American Kareem Allen to make way for Singleton, who averaged 27 points a game with Birmingham two seasons ago.

Hopley hoping to go semi-pro

DAVID LLEWELLYN

Damian Hopley has become a part-time professional. Hopley, a centre, who turns out for his club Wasps in his England position of right wing in the Pilkington Cup fourth-round tie at Sale today, has given up a job in the City of London.

"I'm speaking to a number of people at the moment," Hopley, 25, said. "I'm looking to go semi-professional, working as a promotions officer or consultant." The trend to go full or part-time pro has already been set by, among others, Tony Underwood, Martin Bayfield, Dean Richards and Kyran Bracken.

"The England contract helped. To have that cushion made the decision a lot easier,"

Hopley, a theology graduate, said. "I felt my lifestyle up to now was not beneficial to my rugby: I was getting up at 6am, working through to 6pm then having to go and train. Now I will have time to train and time to rest."

No rest today, though. Wasps did win at Sale in the league earlier this season but Paul Turner's side will be no pushover. The Wasps' captain, Lawrence Dallaglio, has been picked in his England position of open side flanker.

Their London neighbours Harlequins have not been so obliging. Their captain Jason Leonard, who played at tight-head against Western Samoa, is back at loosehead for the trip to Orrell, who have won the two previous Cup encounters between the clubs.

The match of the day is between First Division leaders, Bath, and their Second Division counterparts, Northampton. Bath have been adopting an expansive approach all season and it sounds as if captain Phil de Glanville intends to continue the process at The Rec today. "We have established a very clear playing pattern during the first 10 league games," said the Bath and England centre, "and much of the time in Portugal this week was spent fine-tuning our skills." The selection of Simon Geoghegan and Jon Sleightholme on each wing certainly points to possible difficulties for Northampton.

The Glamorgan batsman Steve James switches from flannelled fool to muddled oaf when the Division Five South leaders, Lydney, travel to Winton Park, the Division Five North side coached by the former England scrum-half Dewi Morris. "We don't really know much about them," James said yesterday, "we know it's going to be hard."

Saracens have a lengthy injury list but are still confident of beating Third Division Rugby Lions. This match at Southgate kicks off at 1.45pm.

Elsewhere Rob Andrew's Newcastle tackle Moseley, Leicester travel to Exeter whom, three years ago, they thrashed 76-0. Bristol are at Third Division Reading and Worcester's first season in the competition has rewarded them with a trip to Second Division Bedford. Two former finalists, London Irish and London Welsh, will be joined in a battle of the exiles in a near sell-out match at Sumbury.

St Helens looking to maintain tradition

Rugby League
DAVE HADFIELD

The Christmas derby may not, after all, be a turkey doomed to have its neck wrung after this year.

Although the switch to summer rugby means that this festive season's will be the last league matches on Boxing Day and New Year's Day, St Helens are hoping to preserve the tradition. Saints have a lucrative annual meeting with Wigan on Boxing Day that they are reluctant to lose.

"We have come up with the idea that we should have a two-legged Winter Challenge, played on Boxing Day and New Year's Day, and decided on aggregate," said the Saints' chief executive, David Howes.

"We have put the idea to Wigan, who are interested in principle. The Rugby League would then have to give their permission, because it would fall outside the normal season."

"It is an attempt to capitalise on two of the block-busting sporting days of the year - but with a difference."

The financial temptations are obvious, but there are also clear drawbacks. Players would be asked to perform during their close-season, and coaches could regard it all as an unnecessary distraction. Despite that, other clubs which traditionally meet over the holiday period - like Hull and Hull KR or Halifax and Bradford - are certain to be at least interested in the prospect.

But the Bradford Bulls coach and chief executive, Brian Smith, sounded a note of caution: "You are asking spectators to pay to watch players out of season, in matches which mean nothing," he said. "I'm 99 per cent certain that it won't happen."

The Leeds coach, Dean Bell, admitted to some sadness if the pattern of holiday derbies is to come to an end. "It has become a great tradition for everyone to go out on the day after Christmas and see a traditional derby game," he said.

"But we have got to move on and summer rugby will hopefully bring more supporters through the turnstiles and give our game a lift."

Bell hopes to have Garry Schofield and Tony Kemp available again after injury for this Boxing Day's meeting with Castleford. "With this being the last Boxing Day fixture, it will be really special," Schofield said.

Meanwhile Leeds have failed in an attempt to sign Batley's Australian scrum-half, Glen Tomlinson.

Formula One drivers warned off karts

Motor sport

The annual charity fund-raising Masters karting event attracted capacity crowds of 24,000 at Palais Omnisports in Paris last weekend despite the withdrawal of the Formula One champion Michael Schumacher at short notice with flu.

Other leading Formula One drivers including David Coulthard, Jacques Villeneuve and Damon Hill were not allowed to compete by their teams because of the risk of injury. A risk underlined by five drivers with Formula One experience who suffered injuries after the first night of the two-day event.

The Brazilian Roberto Moreno bruised his ribs, Finland's Mika Salo damaged a shoulder, the Italian Andrea Montermini cracked a rib, France's Olivier Grouillard bruised some ribs and the Italian Vincenzo Sospini suffered a badly sprained wrist after Salo's kart landed upside down on him following a spectacular collision.

Philippe Streiff, the organiser, said the event has become too popular and competitive for its own good and may have to change in order to survive.

"I started this event for fun," said Streiff who is confined to a wheelchair since he broke his

neck in a Formula One test drive crash in Brazil six years ago. "It was a spectacle for the public and enjoyment for all the drivers, especially all the Formula One stars, who came to take part. But now it is too serious. The drivers go too fast and there are too many injuries."

"The younger guys take it very seriously and fight hard," Streiff said. "The crowd love to see it, but it is dangerous for the Formula One drivers, of course. So, they need to have better protection - and we have to find a way of doing that to keep the event as successful as it is."

"We have to make the karts safer and we have to make the drivers more secure and better protected," he said.

Johnny Herbert, the winner of last season's British and Italian Grands Prix agreed with that analysis: "It is a great event and we all enjoy coming here each year," he said. "But you have to be careful. Injuries can be a problem, obviously, so we have to keep up of trouble."

"I know it has been worse this year. There have been a lot of very competitive younger guys from other junior formulae taking part, some of them karting champions and wearing protective waistcoats under their gear."

"Sometimes it is better to let them get on with it."

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First prize
Z-D9300M Mid-Fi Hi-Fi System
LCX-500 Micro Hi-Fi System
HV-FX77 VCR
XP-R800 Personal CD Player
Second Prize
NSX-999 Mini Hi-Fi System
HS-R848 Personal Stereo Tape Model HV-FX77 VCR
Third Prize
LCX-500 Micro Hi-Fi System
HS-R848 Personal Stereo Tape Model HV-FX77 VCR
Fourth Prize
LCX-500 Micro Hi-Fi System
HV-FX77 VCR
Fifth Prize
LCX-500 Micro Hi-Fi System
XP-R800 Personal CD Player
Runners-up
LCX-500 Micro Hi-Fi System

These great Aiwa prizes take home entertainment to new heights of enjoyment. Here is a brief description of each component prize.

The Z-D9300M Mid-Fi Hi-Fi System incorporates a Dolby Pro Logic speaker system and 5-CD auto changer. It has five speakers with ample power output, 3-band

tuner, graphic equaliser, double auto-reverse cassette deck and betamax automatic transportable.

The compact size of the LCX-500 Micro Hi-Fi System belies the quality of its sound. This versatile system comprises 40W+10W amplifiers, 3-band tuner, top-loading CD player, cassette deck and speakers.

The HV-FX77 VCR is packed with features that make recording and playing so simple that even adults can do it. It has four heads for increased picture clarity, VideoPlus for ease of programming and a one-month, six event timer programme. For music on the move, the lightweight XP-R800 Personal CD Player offers great CD sound plus a digital synthesiser tuner with 30 pre-set bands.

The NSX-999 Mini Hi-Fi System is built around a powerful 150W+150W amplifier, linked to a tuner, 3-CD auto changer CD player, and a double auto-reverse cassette deck. The speaker system features 3-way bass reflex.

The HS-R848 Personal Stereo Tape Model offers full remote control with a digital tuner and one-key joystick operation.

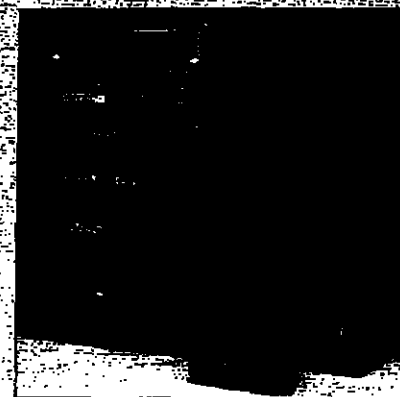
How To Enter: To be in with a chance of winning one of the prize packages listed, you must collect four differently numbered tokens from the seven we have published.

Today is your last chance to enter and we are giving you Token Seven and the entry form. Fill in the entry form and send it, along with your four differently numbered tokens, to the address shown. Rules are as previously published.

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Send your completed entry form, along with 4 differently numbered tokens, to: Independent/ Aiwa Prize Draw, P.O. Box 250, Welwyn Garden City, Herts AL7 1TU. Closing date: 16 January 1996.

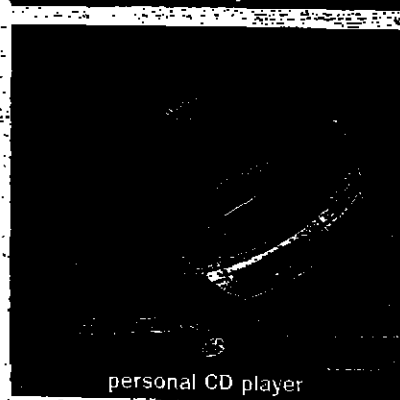
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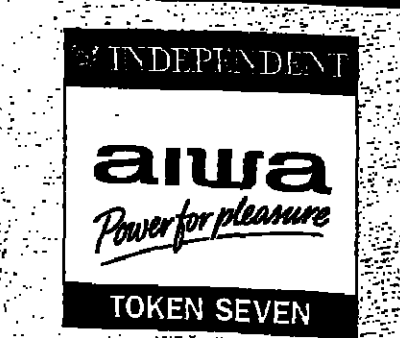
mid-fi hi-fi system



micro hi-fi system



personal CD player



sport



Left to right: Eric Cantona goes over the top; England 'fans' riot at Lansdowne Road; Duncan Ferguson fêted on his return from prison; George Graham protests his innocence

Photographs: AP/Emphics/Peter Jay/Reuters

The year of men behaving badly

Glenn Moore looks back over 12 months which began with a kick, ended with a punch and had plenty of football in between countless trips to court

Christmas approaches and football could certainly do with a season of goodwill. A year that opened with Eric Cantona vaulting into a fan draws to its conclusion with Graeme Le Saux grazing his knuckles on David Batty's suble. Forget the TV series, if you want to see men behaving badly, go to the footie.

In between Cantona's and Le Saux's antics there were riots off the field and stampings on it; the England manager in court and the Scotland centre-forward in jail; managers treating their contracts with contempt, and a chairman and a director conducting a row through the tabloids.

However, it was even worse on the Continent. Patrice Loko, of France, exposed himself to a policeman and ended up in a mental hospital; Dynamo Kiev were expelled from the Champions' League for attempted bribery; and PAOK Salonika were taken over by hooligan supporters. In the wider world, Panama's Colombian international Faustino Asprilla was convicted of a firearms offence; an Angolan manager was assassinated, allegedly by rival fans; and Uefa and Fifa, the governing bodies of European and world football respectively, engaged in a power struggle.

These overseas shenanigans

almost make Duncan Ferguson appear the nice boy Joe Royle claims he is. Even so, the days when the British game could loftily take the moral high ground are long gone. The most damaging case of all, the bribery allegations made against Bruce Grobbelaar, John Fashanu and Hans Segers, rumbles on with no sign of a conclusion.

But is the game morally bankrupt? Or is it merely suffering from more intensive media scrutiny? And if it is, does it merely reflect society? Yes, paradoxically, it probably does, though it would be an outrageous (and potentially expensive) slur on the vast majority to suggest football people are morally bankrupt.

"You have to put things in perspective," Gordon Taylor, the chief executive of the PFA, the players' union, said. "There have been problems this year who are under intense pressure and are expected to have old heads on young shoulders. Men of much more senior stature, politicians and businessmen, fall by the wayside."

Taylor, who has first-hand experience of an intrusive media, admits that "the illumination of off-field activities is the price football pays for its increased stature. It is an indication of just how much football is part of the fabric of our society."

January

Eric Cantona assaults Matthew Strachan, a Crystal Palace supporter, with his feet and fists. Cantona is suspended for three games. Steve McManis, manager of Millwall, is suspended for three games for a racist remark. Paul Winstanley, manager of Peterborough, is suspended for three games for a racist remark.

February

England manager Trevor Francis is suspended for three games for a racist remark. Scotland manager Alex Ferguson is suspended for three games for a racist remark. Duncan Ferguson is suspended for three games for a racist remark.

March

Chris Appleby, of Crystal Palace, is suspended for three games for a racist remark. Bruce Grobbelaar is suspended for three games for a racist remark.

John Fashanu is suspended for three games for a racist remark. Hans Segers is suspended for three games for a racist remark. Steve McManis is suspended for three games for a racist remark.

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TODAY

Football

3.0 unless stated

FA CUP FIRST ROUND

Manchester City v Chelsea

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Manchester City v Chelsea

WEEKEND FIXTURE GUIDE

Football

3.0 unless stated

FA CUP FIRST ROUND

Manchester City v Chelsea

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Manchester City v Chelsea

MAJOR BOXING DAY FIXTURES

Football

3.0 unless stated

FA CUP FIRST ROUND

Manchester City v Chelsea

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Manchester City v Chelsea

Signs of unrest at the Brummie Road End

FAN'S EYE VIEW

No 129

WBA

BOB WOFFINDEN

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Ice hockey

BRITISH LEAGUE PREMIER DIVISION

3.0 unless stated

Manchester City v Chelsea

Manchester City v Chelsea

Manchester City v Chelsea

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Manchester City v Chelsea

Ice hockey

BRITISH LEAGUE PREMIER DIVISION

3.0 unless stated

Manchester City v Chelsea

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Manchester City v Chelsea

Which is something Rupert Murdoch understands very well: he who pays the piper plays the tune. And, more importantly, he who has the cameras there gets the news story.

Roberto Duran, the 44-year-old four-times former world champion from Panama, stopped the American Wilbur Garst with 46 seconds of the fourth round remaining in a scheduled 10-round super-middleweight fight in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, on Thursday.

Duran won the first of his world titles in 1972, when he knocked out Britain's Ken Buchanan for the lightweight

championship. He later held welterweight, junior middleweight and middleweight titles.

Duran, who lives in Miami, dominated Garst with jabs and straight rights as well as telling blows to the body. Garst landed some rights to the head but not enough to overcome Duran. "He hit me with some good shots, but I just had to measure him right," Duran said.

Duran's record is 97 wins and 11 defeats, with 67 knock outs. Garst, from Tulsa, is 17-4.



Weekend

Things to do
places to go
shows to see
this Christmas

PLUS
FULL TV AND RADIO LISTENES
THROUGH TO BOXING DAY
AND TUESDAY'S SHOWS
PAGES 11-24

INSIDE STORIES

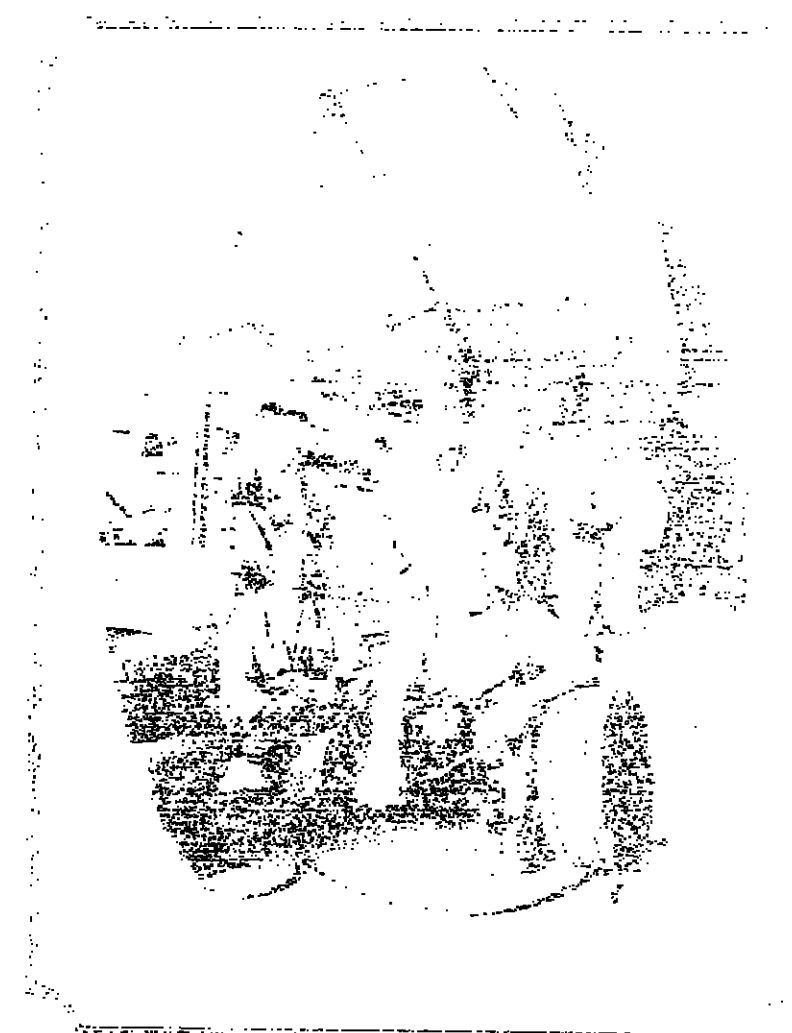
3 Running BBC1 is the closest anyone in the media gets to picking the national football team. In both jobs, error incites orgasmic abuse. It's a measure of Alan Yentob's success that not a single tabloid headline has compared him to a vegetable

9 Dickens is surely the world's leading Foodie novelist: you can scarcely flick through 10 consecutive pages without bumping into a steaming veal pie, succulent oysters, slabs of beefsteak, wedding cake or - curious fellow that he was - threatened cannibalism

6 The reason I was in a service station at 11pm on Christmas Eve deciding whether my mother would prefer the Milk Tray or the wilting pot plant was, according to Dr Joseph R Ferrari, because I was consumed by self-loathing. So that's it.

12 I am no stranger to loud noise. I once dated a woman with two kids. But at midnight on Christmas Eve in El Salvador, with the windows shut, the air conditioner on, the TV turned up and the bathroom door closed, I couldn't hear myself sing 'Wild Colonial Boy' in the shower.

PHOTOGRAPH OF THE ENGLISH NATIONAL BALLET
PRODUCTION OF 'TALES OF BEATRICE POTTER' BY LAURIE LEVINS

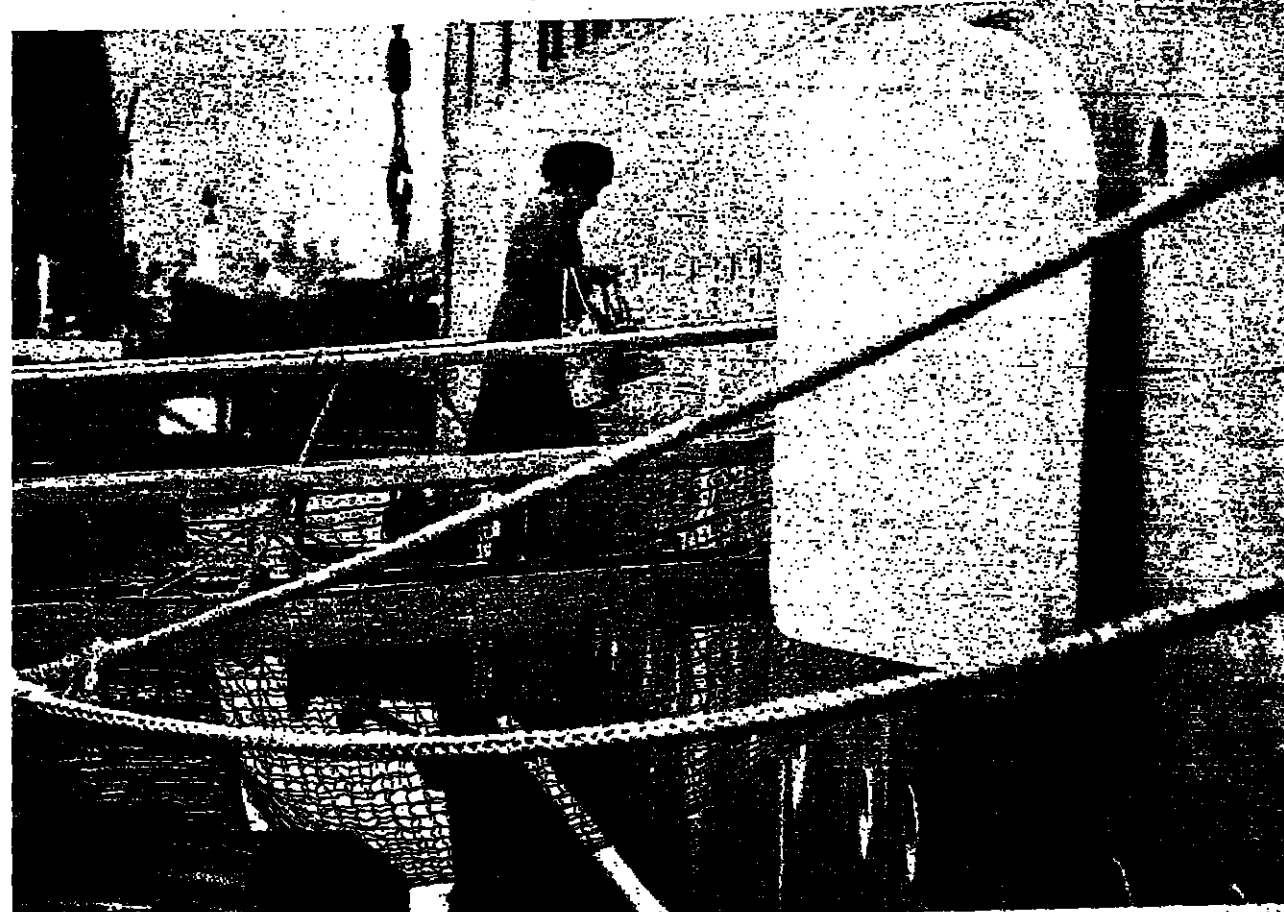
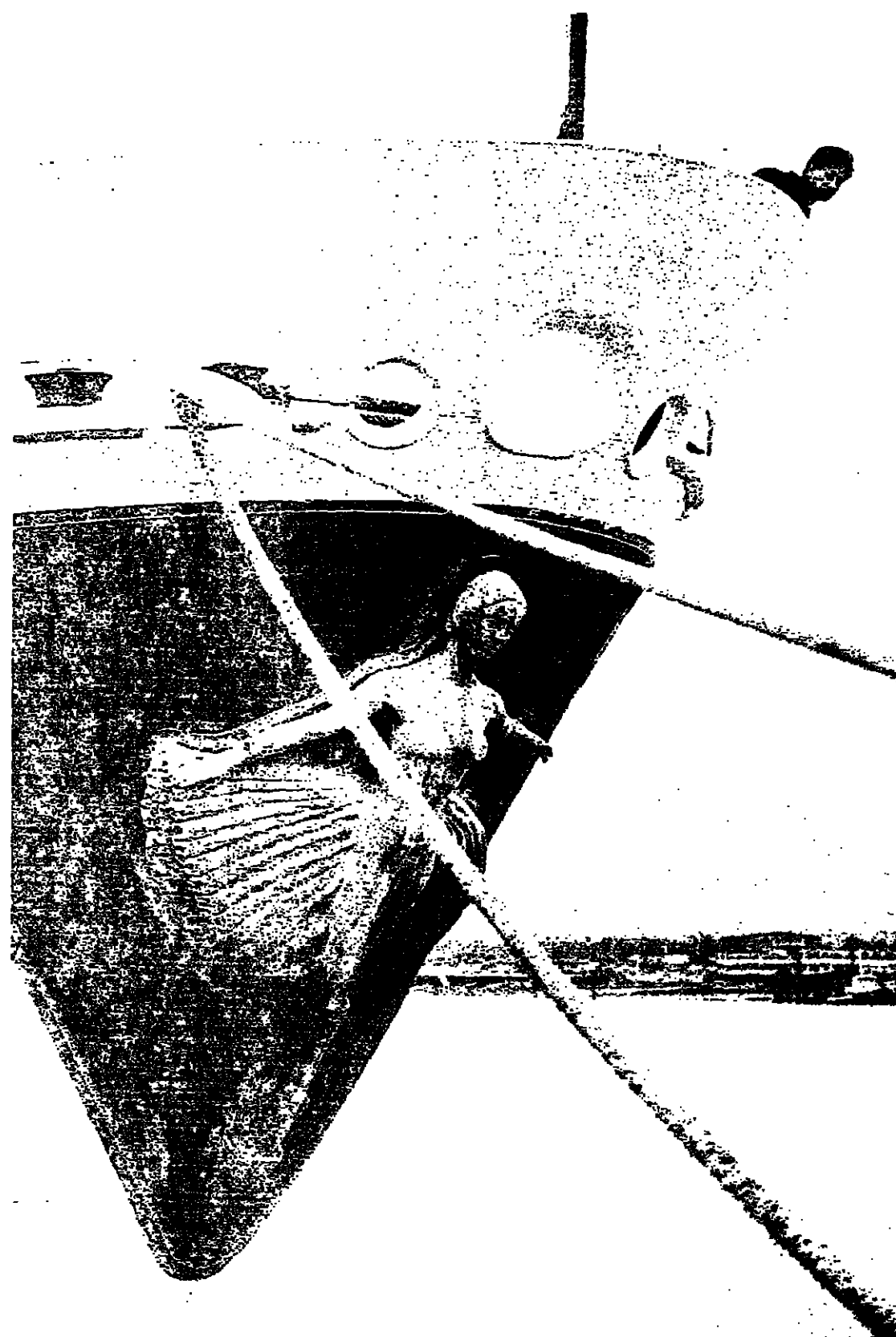


PICTURE STORY	2	BOOKS	8-9	TRAVEL	12-14	TELEVISION AND RADIO	25
INTERVIEW	3	COUNTRY	10	MONEY	16-17	TODAY	26
SHOPPING	4-6	PROPERTY	11	GOING OUT	18-19	CHRISTMAS EVE	23
ARTS	7	GARDENING	11	PASTIMES	21-23	CHRISTMAS DAY	22
						BOXING DAY	24

MANY THINGS HAVE GONE FOR A FORTON THEN, BUT I'VE LEFT THEM FULLY NOT IN BURIAL. MARSTON'S DECIDED HEAVENLY THE GOLDEN PINT IT WAS IN GOOD OLD JOHN MARSTON'S HAND BECAUSE IT'S THE ONLY ONE THAT WON'T BE FORGOTTEN. THANK HEAVENS SOME THINGS ARE WHAT THEY USED TO BE.



picture story



Pictures by Glynn Griffiths
Story by Simon Calder

CRUISING AWAY FROM IT ALL

At five past five on Wednesday, shoppers enduring a final burst of hyperactivity within the artless confines of Toys 'R' Us were too absorbed with last-minute shopping to notice the sleek funnel sliding south along Southampton Water for the last time. "It's a sad event," says Captain Berni Fronth, looking out from the bridge at the line of lanky cranes marching off into the mist. "We've had a good relationship with Southampton." But the vessel's Norwegian owner, Fred Olsen, has decided that the financial and operational advantages of Dover outweigh its traditional loyalty to the Hampshire port. So on Wednesday, the *Black Prince* steamed out of berth 105 and left behind a quarter-century of cruising from Southampton.

For the next two weeks, Captain Fronth will be in legal charge of 450 passengers (mostly British) and 200 crew (Norwegian officers, Thai and Filipino dining staff). The equivalent of a Hampshire village will spend Christmas cruising around the Canary Islands, ending up at Madeira for the New Year's Eve fireworks display.

"Nine times out of 10, if all the relatives come round, it just ends in a big punch-up," says David Middleton, a furniture manufacturer, who is escaping Christmas on his sixth cruise. When he and his family go on board, the staff greet them like long-lost friends. "Southampton's such a disaster zone, with what the council's done or not done, that getting away for Christmas is the finest thing you could do. You don't have to worry about going to church – the church comes to you."

Cliff Comyns, the ship's chaplain, says his 20 years spent ministering to the spiritual needs of the Paras is ideal preparation for cruising. "Life on board is just like the Army. From breakfast until midday, I wander around talking to people, particularly those travelling on their own. In the afternoon, I just loiter with intent."

Britain's two biggest tour operators have begun navigating the cruising market: Thomson and Airtours both offer a starting price of £399 for a week in the Med. On

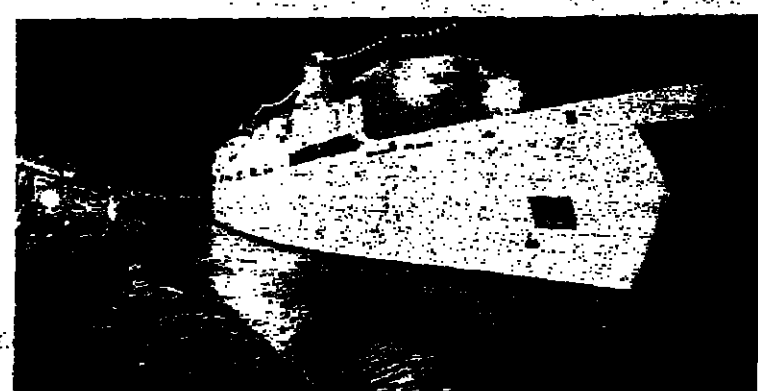
the *Black Prince*, though, the average passenger has paid £1,300 for the Christmas cruise. This buys a modest cabin, with design values dating from the mid-Sixties when the vessel was built: functional furniture draped in turquoise fabric.

"Oh – she's on here. I thought she'd be dead by now." No malice lay behind this casual remark in the Neptune lounge: it merely reflected the fact that the average passenger is aged 68. Some are helped aboard with wheelchairs uncharitably marked "Southampton Cargo Handling". Dr Jim Naysmith is taking time out from heading the medical team at Cardiff rugby club to look after rather more frail charges. "Some people seem to get aboard to get attention – they have access to 24-hour care."

For some repeat customers, the care from dining staff is what counts. Pat and Britt Carne got into maritime mood by taking the ferry across from their home on the Isle of Wight. "They've gone overboard to help us," says Mrs Carne, pausing to smile at her unfortunate nautical metaphor. "We've been sailing on the *Black Prince* since the Sixties, and we have the same table in the same restaurant every time. They even know whether you prefer one cup of tea or two after your meal." Mr Carne recalls the first voyage of the Russian cruise ship *Ussuriansk*. "It was bloody awful – they kept the light ale in the deep freeze: we ended up with beer lollipops."

Two first-timers are working a passage to the sun. Mislava and Zrinka Mikelic (pictured at the piano, above centre) are virtuosi sisters from Croatia, invited on board to entertain passengers in the Aquitaine Lounge with classical music. Aged 19 and 21 respectively, the violinist and pianist also handily reduce the average on-board age by a month or two.

David Middleton sums up the pleasure of a floating population delighted to be leaving home – and Southampton. "If you have Christmas at home, the wife's stuck making the dinner while the old man's down the pub. Here, the wife and the old man both go down the pub."



THIS WEEKEND WHY NOT...

EDITED BY DAVID BENEDICT

READ
A Classic
Christmas
Crime



Famous as the season of inns, donkeys and Herod, Yuletide is equally notorious for thoughts of matricide, parricide and infanticide. To quell such notions, take a break from Delia's Christmas Countdown, oceans of wrapping paper and tears of hyperactive offspring, and dip into *A Classic Christmas Crime*, edited by Tim Heald. There are 13 stories in the collection, in settings as far flung as Florida and Yorkshire, each with a seasonal theme (pudding, crackers, charades), the work of a baker's dozen of premier league writers, among them Simon Brett, Peter Lovesey, HRF Keating, Liza Cody and – a rare sighting in story collections – PD James (above), with a teasingly "autobiographical" mystery, "The Mistletoe Murder". Just the thing to absorb, like a box of bittermints, beside a roaring fire, while you can still stand anything with the word Christmas in the title...
Published by Pavilion at £14.99

TASTE
Whisky
Galore!



Remember that delightful Ealing comedy based on Compton Mackenzie's celebrated novel? It is accompanying a spiffing exhibition aboard a magical ship-shaped set with numerous background facts and artefacts to the spirited story. Pride of place goes to a bottle recovered from the SS *Politician*, sunk off the island, only recently liberated from the claws of HM Customs & Excise. You can't swig from that one, but there are free tasting sessions in which to educate your palate to the tune of eight individual Highland malts, and a Christmas Gallery Trail, with a gleaming bottle of the stuff as the star prize.

At the Imperial War Museum, London SE1. Tastings (4pm 27, 28 Dec) must be booked, today only, on 0171-416 5311. The film is at 3pm 27, 28 Dec. Exhibition runs to 28 Jan. Admission £4.10 / £3.10 concs.

SEE
La Belle et
la Bête



Mme Leprince de Beaumont isn't exactly a household name, but in 1757 she wrote a fairy-tale which has been undergoing a renaissance ever since Disney cast Angela Lansbury to do a voice-over for a singing teapot and cleaned up at the box-office. Marvellous though the cartoon of *Beauty and the Beast* is, it pales beside Cocteau's ravishing film. The simple storytelling is enriched by startlingly beautiful surreal images, while the stunning art direction and photography has inspired everyone up to and including Tim Burton. This unqualified masterpiece now looks better than it has done for 30 years thanks to a luscious new print, full of liquid blacks and whites. Children will fall in love with cinema; adults, too, will gasp with sheer pleasure.
Edinburgh Filmhouse 0131-228 2688 / London NFT 0171-928 3232. Selected release from next week.

BUY
A Proper
Gate

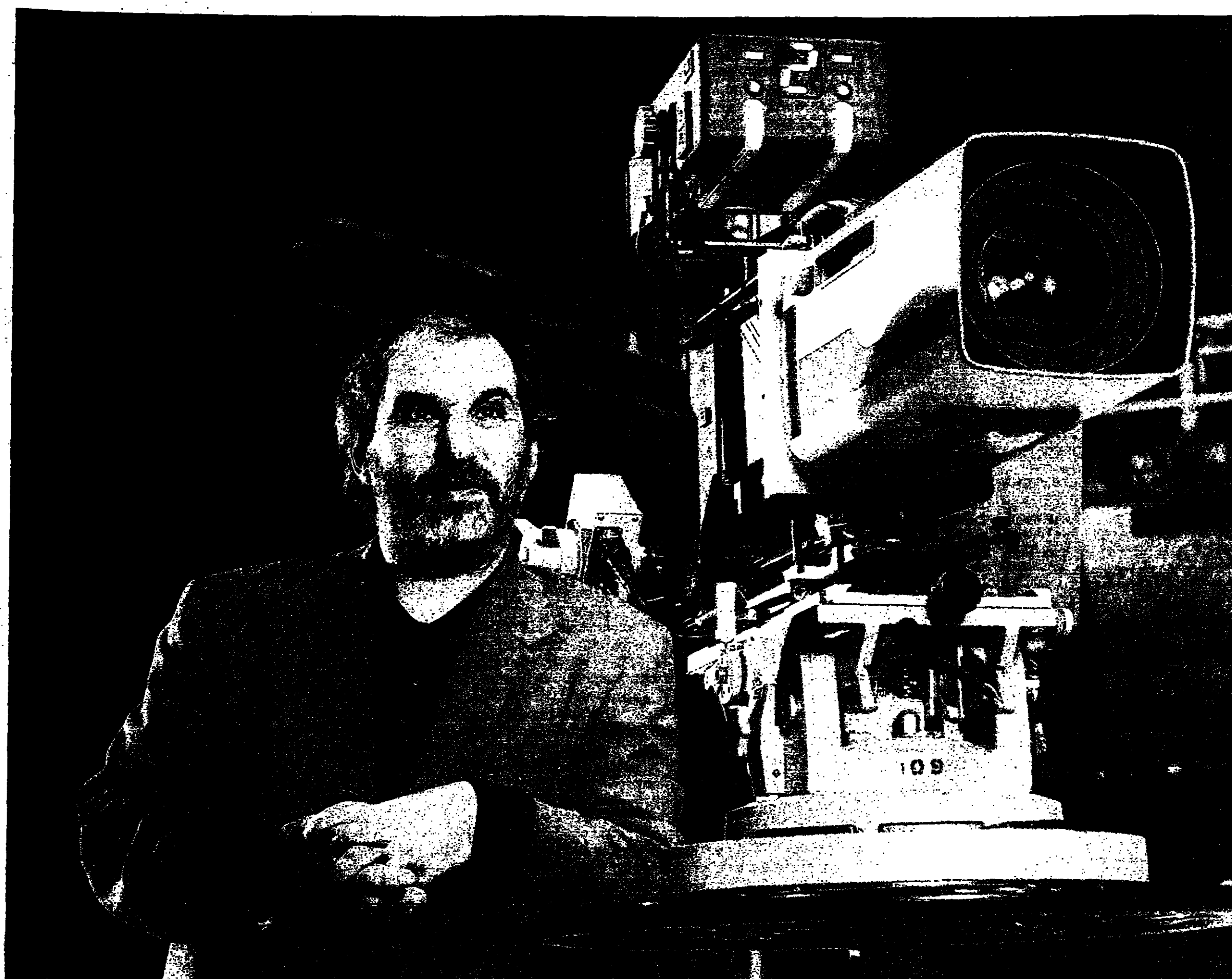


There must be a life beyond fences, thought Robin Maitland, who set up his company Proper Gates to escape from the drudgery of his main occupation as a fencing contractor. Mud, rain, cold, nettles and brambles finally convinced him that at least part of the winter ought to be spent under cover. Now he designs and makes a wide variety of gates for houses, racing stables, churches and schools. He has devised a patent method of incorporating such motifs as cockerels and swans made of metal, ply as centrepieces in solidly constructed gates of treated softwood. Other more traditional designs have been copied from the gates of rectories, manors and estates around his 17th-century farm in Shropshire.
Proper Gates is at Overton, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 4DJ. 01584 877914.

KNIT
Gronit's
Scarf



Learn to knit with Gronit. Being of a generous disposition, our friend has decided to share his superior knowledge of needlecraft with the nation in the form of his very own Knit Kit. So you will be convinced by shots of our friend knitting and plying away in Gronit's latest kit, a *Chloe Scarf*, a sheep-knitting kit also starring Sean the lamb. The kit has everything a child needs, from the rainbow-coloured yarn and needles to an attractive and durable PVC kit bag, which also contains *Knitting for Dummies*, an essential guide to the art and craft of haberdashery.
£2.99, available in selected branches of Debenhams, H&M, Next, John Lewis, plus many other stores. *Chloe Scarf* can be seen in person at 11.30am, "The Wrong Knitters", 27 Dec at 6pm and 8pm, Grand Day Out, 28 Dec at 6pm, all on BBC2.



The host of Christmas present

Alan Yentob is about to become Santa Claus: As controller of BBC1, it is his job to prepare a carefully wrapped package of programmes for the most captive audience of the year. But does he have the populist touch to deliver the goods? By Jasper Rees. Photograph by Herbie Knott

On the night that 22.8 million people were at home watching *Dianarama*, Alan Yentob went to the opera. The invitation to Hindemith came from Jeremy Isaacs, the director of the Royal Opera House, "who's a friend of mine". The protocol among the bosses of great British cultural institutions is much the same as at head of state level. For this sort of invitation, you just don't plead a prior engagement. But it was perhaps the "difficulty" of the opera that prompted Yentob to issue a proviso with his acceptance. Of course, he had seen it all before, but he told Isaacs that he "really must" watch the BBC's biggest moment of the year live.

Yentob is a great one for seeing how his schedules look on screen as well as on paper, so, to humour him, Isaacs laid on his office. Whereupon Mrs Isaacs, Gillian Widdicombe, let it be known that she too would rather not miss the interview. So did Yentob's partner Philippa Walker. Isaacs, facing a rout, chose to go with the flow. The quartet duly vacated their seats some time before 9.25pm, watched *Dianarama*, toasted the triumph with champagne and returned to their seats for the climax of the opera.

This is the near-perfect Alan Yentob story. For a start, it shows him hard at work, even when out at play. It incorporates some judicious name-dropping, a bit of string-pulling and a splash of superior liquid. It also shows him being ever so slightly cheeky. Above all, it finds enjoying culture as high as it gets while simultaneously staying in touch with his public. If only Yentob had phoned home to check up on his two young children, the snapshot of a well-connected, domestically and professionally diligent cultural contortionist would have been complete.

He tells this story as he navigates the route between his office, where this interview has been sandwiched (along with sandwiches) into his schedule, to Studio Four, Studio Four, where the photographer awaits, is the place they used to make *That's Life*. Then Yentob axed it before it lost any more viewers. It was through amputations like this that Yentob discovered the bottom line: running BBC1 is the closest anyone in the media can get to picking the national football team. In either job, error incites orgiastic abuse.

The similarity is most apparent at the launch of the BBC's winter season, a lavish affair in the ballroom of the Hilton in Park Lane. (A bit of a homecoming for the boy Yentob, as it happens: his family moved to a mansion block here when he was 12). This is Yentob's quarterly date with the press, and after the odd mixture of actors and hacks have watched the preview tape, the sharp-suited gaffer stands at the centre of a circle of quote-hungry microphones and notebooks and fields questions. "Are you happy about the improved performance of the drama department, Alan?" "What about the big Christmas clash between *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street*?" "Are you pleased you've closed the gap on ITV by a couple of points?"

It's a measure of Yentob's success that in three years not one tabloid headline has compared him with a root vegetable. His most dogged assailant is the former television critic of the *Observer*, who reversed his name to Botney and still coughs up gobblets of Swiftian bile into the spittoon that is his column. But Yentob has very few public enemies. This is lucky, because he is extremely sensitive to criticism. If Bobby Robson went grey and Graham Taylor tramped offstage in a fog of his and others' expletives, you dread to think what national disfavour would do to Yentob.

At this time of year, though it may not know it, the nation looks to him. To all intents and purposes, the controller of BBC1 is Father Christmas, dropping a package of programmes down the chimney that families unwrap together. "It's one of the few occasions of the year," he says, "when you could be getting people just sitting down watching your schedule quite consistently throughout the evening."

Though this appears to be a slice of worthy controllerspeak, it is a revealing remark. While viewers aren't trained to absorb and react to the shape of a schedule, they may well have noticed the adjacency of last Saturday's Lottery result and Screen One's *It Might Be You*, a playful portrait of the disharmony sown by lottery wins. Yentob doesn't make programmes any more, so pulling such juxtapositions out of the hat is the closest he gets to creativity. If he could have relocated it to a Saturday, there's no doubt that the mischievous Yentob would have scheduled

Panorama's Camelot investigation after the draw too. (Whatever his channel says about it, incidentally, he still does the lottery: so far he has twice won £10.)

It Might Be You was written by Nigel Williams, the novelist, editor of *Omnibus* and Yentob's best BBC friend. They both joined the corporation in the late 1960s. "He was like the bloke in the years above, really," says Williams. "He knew the ropes. He was obsessive about his work, even then: 24 hours a day. Work to him was pleasure." He failed to make what Williams calls "that very English separation" between work and play. "He was very unlike the correct civil servant graduate type which at that time the BBC used to employ a hell of a lot of."

Yentob's application showed nauseating pluck: "I wrote something extremely facetious which would have irritated me if I had read it. I said, 'I've played one of the merry wives ...'. Actually I can't tell you this." Go on, give us a scoop. "One of my colleagues in the production said to me, 'You've got lovely legs, you ought to be in show business.' So I thought: the BBC, that's my entrée."

It would be easy to argue that as a redbrick, Sephardic Jew of Iraqi stock, Yentob had to work twice as hard to rise in a still strait-laced institution. Yentob himself says he "probably felt more of an outsider in the English public school system than I did at the BBC. I think the BBC is big enough and generous enough to allow all kinds of individuals to thrive within it. I genuinely believe that about it, otherwise I don't think it would be the kind of liberating and creative place that I think, at its best, it always has been."

(That, by the way, is a truncated though otherwise typical Yentob paragraph: it starts out with the particular and gradually fans out to include a slightly flabby but warm-hearted tribute to the generosity and idealism of the institution to which Yentob has devoted his entire working life. The modern BBC is somewhere between a church and a business, and these days Yentob's speech patterns are an inevitable reflection of that.)

If Yentob was ever an outsider, nearly 30 years at the Corporation have sucked him so far into the inner sanctum that his ashes will no doubt be scattered there. No career trajec-

tory can ever have been both so orderly. He began his general traineeship in Bush House where, physically clumsy, he braved self-laceration to cut his own tapes. He moved on to Kensington House and started making the witty, ironic documentaries that would land him the stewardship of *Arena*. From running an arts strand, he graduated to an arts department (Music and Arts), to an arts channel (BBC2). Then, three years ago, came the big One.

The nub of the complaint about Yentob's appointment was this: it's one thing to make clever-clever programmes about the cultural significance of the Cortina, quite another to make popular programmes for people who drive Cortinas. "I'm one of the few people to have actually raced a Cortina," says Noel Edmonds, the channel's main dealer in Cortina television, who might have had most cause to fear his appointment. "I think it was very brave of him to take the job. But more than any other controller that I've had contact with, he has managed to make the people in entertainment feel part of the overall BBC. He has just got an extremely human touch. It was an inspired decision."

"I never felt that me and this job were the perfect fit," he says. "I never said, 'It's so obvious. I should be running BBC1: I'm the answer to popular television.' In fact, I said this could be a terrible folly. On the other hand, I think that the BBC is a complicated beast, and I have a conviction of what I think it's about. The ideal public service TV as the BBC has seen it historically is a tremendously big and bold and interesting idea. If I felt that on the screen," Yentob says now, "then that's because that's the kind of place it is, it's a creative institution." For the winter season, he can boast that there's a lot of new carpeting now in, and some of it looks durable and of quality thread. 1996 looks like another year of solid growth.

When Yentob applied to the BBC, he used what he calls an Oxbridge interview technique. The theory goes that "you have to feel good about yourself but you have to come out of that room making the person interviewing you feel good about themselves as well". He has not lost his touch. The only question he won't be asked is what he thinks of Jim Davidson. There are limits.

popular series are now holding their own: *Hamish Macbeth*, *Dangerfield*, *Pie in the Sky* and *Roughnecks*. Before Yentob started commissioning drama for BBC2, his only brush with any serious form of thespianism had been when he played the lead in a NUS production of a Max Frisch play that passed through the Garrick Theatre one week when Yentob was 17. True to the type that he would become, he played a chain-smoking intellectual. He was given the dressing room of Margaret Leighton, who left him some flowers and afforded him his first opportunity to drop a famous name.

There are two strands to complaints about drama under Yentob: one is that the commissioning process is over-centralised and that, having too many meetings to attend and too many decisions to make, Yentob is indecisive. In the launch video for the Christmas season, Angus Deayton invaded the boss's office to find both in and out trays empty, but the pending tray scraping the ceiling. "That got a huge laugh," says Edmonds. "He tries very very hard to please a lot of people and inevitably that can mean that some decision-taking can take a while. I've got a lot of stuff in that pending file." Among the casualties of the dithering has been *Drop the Dead Donkey*, now Channel 4's only good sitcom.

The second complaint was voiced last Christmas by Andrew Davies, who mystifyingly berated Yentob for ordering drama "like rolls of carpet" when he himself was by far the busiest supplier. "If there's more drama in the drama department than there is on the screen," Yentob says now, "then that's because that's the kind of place it is, it's a creative institution." For the winter season, he can boast that there's a lot of new carpeting now in, and some of it looks durable and of quality thread. 1996 looks like another year of solid growth.

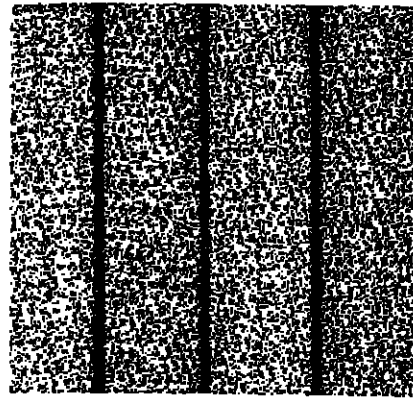
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shopping the sales

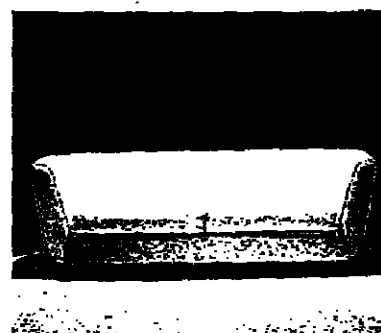
six of the best bargains



1 The Kingshill Collection: Paddy Campbell suit, down from £411 to £209. This fuchsia tweed suit is a bargain indeed. Kingshill sells designer clothes mail-order, and is selling various things at 50 per cent off in their sale. For example, an ice-blue merino/angora Amanda Wakeley cowl neck tunic down from £797 to £148.50 or a Four Seasons parka reduced from £145 to £72.50. For details see below.



2 Crucial Trading: seagrass matting down 25 per cent. Carpet looking shabby? Fancy started the new year with a new floor covering? Crucial Trading has made substantial reductions on its coir, jute and sisal floorings. Trendy seagrass is down 25 per cent, but others have 50 per cent off, including Barley Twist Sisal (now £11.15 per sq m) and Old School Group Coir (now £6.38).



3 The Conran Shop: Fenice sofa, from £155.70 to £75. Not only is The Conran Shop having a regular sale, it is having a two-day warehouse furniture sale on 6 and 7 January, where there will be discounts of 50 per cent and even lower. The store is laying on courtesy buses from the shop to the warehouse in SW16.



4 Racing Green: men's jacket down from £125 to £50. Racing Green, the classic casuals people, are offering discounts of 30 to 60 per cent on much of their stock. This men's wool/cashmere Doncaster jacket is a particularly good find; women's backing jackets are also reduced from £115 to £50. Men's brightly coloured corduroy trousers are being reduced from £39 to £25.



5 Harrods: ostrich tote bag, from £149 to £89, and zip-top bag, from £115 to £59. They say "There Is Only One Sale" and they do have a point: Harrods has some terrific bargains. For example: 40 per cent off a Harrods Own Label black single-breasted women's suit; men's single-breasted cashmere coats reduced from £675 to £375; 50 per cent off Harrods silver photo frames. But can you bear the crush?



6 David Mellor: 28 per cent off cutlery. The smart person's kitchen shop only has one sale a year, and there are some substantial reductions. Up to 98 per cent on assorted slightly damaged kitchen equipment, 20 per cent off most cutlery and 10 per cent off most other tools, crockery and glassware. Worth a visit by anyone planning to buy some new speciality tools anyway.

SALES GUIDE: WHERE TO FIND WHAT AND WHEN

WHAT SHOPPERS IN OXFORD STREET WILL BE BUYING IN THE SALES

Neville Bower
(27)
paper maker from
High Wycombe



"I suppose I might go to the sales. If I do it'll be for clothes but I probably won't come into town specially. I might look at stuff to do with computers though."

Ravin Ranji
(28)
IT Manager from
Lewisham



"I'll definitely go to the sales - I need a video. I know what the prices are and I'm looking for a good one. A Sony or JVC. I'll go to John Lewis, most high-street stores and Selfridges. But I won't be there at the crack of dawn."

Eileen & Charlie Monteith
from Pimlico



"We won't be coming up to Oxford Street for the sales - there are too many people. But we do go to the Army & Navy because it's near home. We'll get Christmas cards for next year and perhaps some decorations. But nothing else."

Linda Shanks
(44)
literary and TV
agent from Islington



"I will be going on the 1st of January - probably on my chap's Christmas presents, which will mainly be clothes. I'll go to Liberty and Paul Smith if it's on. I might see what Nicole Farhi has to offer."

Lynda Moylan
(22)
community artist
from Australia



"I'll look for bras, underwear and cosmetics - things that I can't normally afford. I'm usually an Oxford shopper, but the sales give me an opportunity to get things I can't otherwise have - can you give me any tips on where to go?"

Fred Morgans
(52)
security guard
from Camberwell



"I don't know that they are real. Aren't they just a gimmick? Originally, these stores inflate the real price, and the sales prices are just what they should have been in the first place. But I'll probably have a look around."

DEPARTMENT STORES

Debenhams
Starts 27 Dec at branches throughout England and Wales. Scottish branches start 26 Dec. 334-348 Oxford Street, London W1 (0171-580 3000). General customer information 0171-408 3333.

Fenwick
Starts 27 Dec at 63 New Bond Street, London W1 (0171-629 9161) and stores in Brent Cross, Windsor, Leicester, York, Canterbury and Tunbridge Wells. Sale at the large Newcastle branch starts 28 Dec. At Bond Street, Mondri collections will be reduced by 30-50 per cent; Fenn Wright & Manson, Betty Barclay collections by up to 50 per cent, and 30 per cent off Weekend Collections. Reductions at Brent Cross include up to 50 per cent off French Connection, Jacques Vert and Bianca; 50 per cent off leather handbags and selected jewellery by Monet, Ciro and Napier.

Fortnum & Mason
Sale starts 28 Dec at 181 Piccadilly, London W1 (0171-734 8040).

Harrods
Smash-and-grab of the year starts 3 Jan at Knightsbridge, London SW1 (0171-730 1234). Reductions of up to half price are offered throughout the store. Account customers receive an additional 10 per cent off their shopping on day one of the sale. The ladies fashion department offers 40 per cent off Harrods Own Label black single-breasted suit, 30 per cent off Frank Usher and 30 per cent off Jasper Conran dress and occasion wear. For men, up to 50 per cent off silk ties, up to 40 per cent off men's knitwear and lambswool and cashmere scarves. Children get 40 per cent off David Charles dresses, 40 per cent off Sally Membery dresses and 30 per cent off Paul Smith. In china and glass, discounts of 50 per cent on Royal Scott 'Melrose' hand-cut lead crystal and 55 per cent off Atlantis 'Lyric' full-lead crystal. All those Christmas movies you videoed will look larger than life on a Sanyo CTV 28" Nicam telly, down from £1,299 to £999. If you live outside London, or can't bear the crowds, Harrods is also offering discounts through its new sale catalogue. For a copy, ring 0800 730123, open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Harvey Nichols
Starts 27 Dec at 109-125 Knightsbridge, London SW1 (0171-235 5000). The sale is expected to last around three weeks. Account customers get an additional 10 per cent off the sale price for the first four days. Specific bargains are a secret, but expect reductions to be up to 50 per cent off selected items throughout the store.

House of Fraser
Starts 26 Dec in Scotland; 27 Dec in England and Wales. For store sites, ring 0171-963 2236. Bargains in the cookshop include 40 per cent off Le Creuset cast iron cookware in American green and burgundy and 50 per cent off Judge satin stainless steel cookware. Over at the homewares department, Drifter goose-down duvet covers (9 tog for spring, autumn and 4.5 tog for summer) are half the recommended retail price at £129. Also half price is Romantique embellished bed linen in cream and white, reduced from £70 to £35.

John Lewis Partnership
Clearance sale starts 28 Dec at 278-306 Oxford Street, London W1 (0171-629 7711) at the following branches - Peter Jones, Sloane Square, John Lewis, Brent Cross, Bamber Bridge, Newcastle, John Lewis, Cheadle, John Lewis, Aberdeen and John Lewis, Edinburgh. The sale starts 29 Jan at all other branches including Bonds, Norwich; Cole Brothers, Sheffield; John Lewis, Bristol. Savings around the store of up to 50 per cent. Many bargains in furnishing fabrics, including John Lewis' own brand Jonelle, and china department. Reductions on Royal Doulton, Royal Albert, Portmeirion and Spode 'Blue' Italian ranges.

Liberty
Starts 27 Dec at Regent Street, London W1 (0171-734 1234) and

branches nationwide. Join the hordes sniffing out fabric bargains such as printed Armani silk down from £89.95 to £25. Liberty printed silk from £14.95 to £10 and Liberty Veruna wool from £22 to £15. Georgina von Etzdorf velvet scarves are down from £95 to £65. English Eccentrics velvet devore scarves from £159 to £109. Liberty print watches with plain faces are reduced from £29.95 to £14.95 and Jean Paul Gaultier jewellery is half price. Pewter-framed mirrors are half price from £59 to £29.

Marks & Spencer
End-of-season clearance will start 27 Dec at branches nationwide. Inquiries (0171-935 4422).

Selfridges
Starts 27 Dec at Oxford Street, London W1 (0171-629 1234). Armchair browsers can check out sale bargains in Selfridges Selection mail order catalogue, available now (0800 101101). The first week is Selfridges' busiest of the year. If you choose to join the 85,000 due through the doors on the first day, expect to find discounts from designer labels, furniture, china to carpets. Ladieswear discounts include Max Mara suits from £305 to £152, Betty Jackson jackets from £315 to £157 and Moschino T-shirts down from £49 to £34. 50 per cent off handbags by DKNY, Fendi and Osprey. Menswear discounts include up to 50 per cent off Hugo Boss, Nicole Farhi and YSL. CK by Calvin Klein, 30 per cent off Paul Smith, Giorgio Armani coats and Polo Ralph Lauren.

CLOTHES

Amanda Wakeley
Starts 5 Jan for about two weeks at 80 Fulham Road, London SW3 (0171-584 4009). Reductions will be 40-80 per cent off, including samples.

Aquascutum
From 27 Dec at 100 Regent Street, London W1 (0171-734 6090). Reductions of 50-75 per cent of selected items.

Austin Reed
Starts 27 Dec at Regent Street, London W1 (0171-734 6789) and nationwide. Account customers can take advantage of an extra 5 per cent discount on sale prices on the first three days. Selected merchandise discounted by up to 50 per cent including men's wool coats reduced from £279 to £139, wool jackets from £179 to £129. Women's winter coats down from £279 to £139.

Brona
From 5 January to 27 January. At 344 King's Road, London W3 (0171-352 3697). Good discounts on cashmere and tweed. For example, chunky cable cashmere knits down from £225 to £180, cashmere skinny ribs from £150 to £120, tweed jackets from £195 to £145.

Browns
Starts 4 Jan at 23-27 South Molton Street (0171-493 7833). Donna Karan dark camel one-button fitted jacket reduced from £1,180 to £600, matching skirt from £425 to £230. Menswear reductions include Browns Own Label suit £570, reduced to £400.

Chanel
Starts 6 Jan at 26 Old Bond Street, London W1 (0171-493 5040); 31 Sloane Street, London SW1 (0171-235 6631). Reductions on ready-to-wear collections and shoes of about 30 per cent.

Christian Lacroix
Now on at 8a Sloane Street, London SW1 (0171-235 2400) and 29 Old Bond Street, London W1 (0171-409 1994). Discounts of 30 per cent.

Comme des Garçons
Sale now on at 59 Brook Street, London W1 (0171-493 1258). Reductions of up to 40 per cent off all remaining men's and women's collections including Robes de Chambre, Comme des Garçons Tricot and Junya Watanabe.

French Connection
Now on at 99 Long Acre, London WC2 and branches around the

country. General inquiries (0171-580 2507). 30-50 per cent off selected stock.

Herbert Johnson
Starts 4 Jan at 30 New Bond Street, London W1 (0171-408 1174). Reductions of 50 per cent off couture hats, casual hats 25 per cent off and accessories 30 per cent off. Pull-on felt hat down from £105 to £79. Men's hats reduced by up to 60 per cent, a felt trilby is down from £95 to £60.

Hobbs
Now on at Unit 17, The Piazza, Covent Garden, London WC2 (0171-836 9168) and branches nationwide. General customer information 0171-586 5550. Buy your party gear at prices discounted by up to 50 per cent. Strappy stilettos are reduced from £59.99 to £29.99, ballerina shoes from £28.99 to £19.99, satin cross-over dress from £64.99 to £32.99, bouclé flared dress from £49.99 to £29.99 and leopard skirt down from £49.99 to £29.99.

Joseph
Starts 27 Dec. 77 Fulham Road, London SW3 (0171-823 9500). Reductions from 30 per cent off.

Kingshill
This mail-order sale starts 1 Jan. Call 01494 890555. British Designer Collections catalogue £7.50. Diffusion catalogue, £3.50. Phones are staffed from 9am to 7pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 6pm Saturday, Sundays 7 and 14 Jan 9.30-4.30pm. Sale of designer fashions by mail order means you don't need to leave your armchair to hunt bargains. Half price on Paul Costelloe, Nicole Farhi, Jasper Conran, Amanda Wakeley.

Laura Ashley
Begins 27 Dec at branches nationwide. Inquiry number 01686 622116. Begins 26 Dec in Scotland. 20-50 per cent off selected items.

Paul Smith
Starts 13 January at 41 Floral Street, WC2 (0171-379 7133). 25 per cent off everything and further reductions on suits.

Racing Green
Starts 27 Dec at 193 Regent Street, London W1 (0171-437 4300), 33 King Street, Manchester (0161-835 2022), Unit F1, Bental Centre, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey (0181-545 2224). Starts 26 Dec at 16 Buchanan Street, Glasgow (0141-226 4114). A sale catalogue can be obtained from 27 Dec on 0345 331177. Reductions on selected men's and women's classic items of 30-60 per cent. Men's corduroy trousers from £39 to £25 (PW605), ladies' wool cashmere hacking jacket down from £115 to £50.

The Scotch House
Starts 27 Dec at 2 Brompton Road, Knightsbridge, London SW1, 84-86 Regent Street, London W1, and 64 Buchanan Street, Glasgow. Reductions of 30-40 per cent on good quality cashmere and wool jumpers, for example a gold buttoned cashmere cardigan reduced from £235 to £169. Enquiries on 0171-581 2151.

SHOP
Now on at Basement, 4 Brewer Street, London W1 (0171 437 1259). 30-50 per cent off Hysteria Glamour, Judy Blame and Gimme 5.

Space NK
Starts 28 Dec at 11am. 41 Thomas Neal's, Earlham Street, London WC2 (0171-379 7030) 30-40 per cent off designer labels and accessories including Clements Ribello, Future Ozbek, Alberto Biani, Soap Studio, Liza Bruce and Fenn Wright & Manson.

Warehouse
Starts tomorrow at 19-21 Argyle Street, London W1 (0171-437 7101) and branches nationwide. Just in time for last-minute Christmas shopping.

Wealth of Nations
From 31 January until stocks last. Up to 60 per cent off discontinued stock, for example Irish cord workshirts from £38 to £20. Mail order from Wealth of Nations, Unit 28, The Talina Centre, Bagleys Lane, London SW6 2BW (0171-371 5333).

SHOES

Church's
Starts 27 Dec at branches throughout the country. Central enquiry number is 01323 649408. Some styles reduced by more than 50 per cent. Church Belini men's shoes down from £199 to £99, ladies' lily-style high-heeled boot reduced from £120 to £60.

Dr Martens
Starts 4 Jan (midday) at 1-4 King Street, Covent Garden, London WC2 (0171-497 1460). Discounts of 25 per cent will be available on selected lines of footwear, clothing and accessories, with possibility of further reductions as the sale progresses.

Jones Bootmakers
Sale starts 27 Dec at branches throughout the country. Enquiry number is 01323-649408.

K Shoes
Started on 17 December at branches nationwide, will continue well into January. Substantial bargains include £15 off lots of boots and men's shoes; up to £20 on selected ladies' shoes.

Pied à terre
Starts 27 Dec at 32 Neal Street, London WC2 (0171 240 8148) and branches nationwide. Reductions include court shoes reduced from £79 to £40, pumps £65 to £30 and long boots from £95 to £50.

Ravel
Starts tomorrow at 184-188 Oxford Street, London W1 and branches nationwide. Mail order and enquiries on 0171-631 0224. Up to 33 per cent off this season's boots, bags and stiletto-heeled shoes.

Red or Dead
Starts 27 Dec at 1 & 23 Thomas Neal's, Earlham Street, London WC2 (0171 240 5576) and branches nationwide. General inquiries (0171-937 3137). Selected stock reduced by 50 per cent. Sixties-style knee-length nylon boots in gold, black or rust reduced from £120 to £60.

Small and Tall Shoe Shop
Sale of women's shoes in large or small sizes. Sale for large sizes (8 1/2-11 1/2) runs from 27 Dec to 6 Jan. Small sizes (12 1/2-2 1/2) will be reduced from 10 Jan to 20 Jan. 71 York Street, London W1 (0171-723 5321). All current stock will be reduced.

HOMES & INTERIORS

B & Q
Starts Boxing Day at branches nationwide. Blanket reductions on several product lines, including 20 per cent off lightbulbs, a third off discontinued kitchens, 25 per cent off selected lawnmowers, trimmers and hedge trimmers and 20 per cent off house plants. Other bargains include a Country Cottage bathroom suite reduced from £595 to £395 and a Style 400 Shower Heater down from £99.99 to £69.99.

The Conran Shop
Starts 6 Jan until 21 Jan at 81 Fulham Road, London SW3 (0171-589 7401). The Conran Shop is also holding a two-day warehouse furniture sale 6 Jan (10am-6.30pm) and 7 (10am-4pm); discounts of half price are promised along with even lower priced bargains. There will be courtesy buses running between the shop and the warehouse (Unit 16, Merton Park Estate, Lee Road, London SW16).

Crucial Trading
Sale starts 28 December, ends 28 February. Fifty per cent reduction on certain floor coverings, including Old School Group Coir (now £6.38 per sq metre) and Candy Stripe Liquorice Sisal (now £11.15 per sq metre). Twenty five per cent off seagrass floorings and a 20 per cent reduction on everything else. Crucial Trading, 77 Westbourne Park Road, London W2 (0171-221 9000) and 4 St Barnabas Street, Pimlico Green, London SW1 (0171-221 9000).

David Mellor
Sale starts 6 Jan for two weeks at 4 Sloane Square, London SW1 (0171-730 4259). Discounts range from 10 per cent on all standard kitchen merchandise, including kitchen

knives and tools, pottery and porcelain, glassware and coffee-makers. 20 per cent off most of the David Mellor range of cutlery. For real bargain-hunters, up to 90 per cent discount on odds and ends of slightly damaged or soiled merchandise. It's worth noting that David Mellor only has a sale once a year.

Designers Guild
Starts 6 Jan until 20 Jan at 267 Kings Road, London SW3 (0171-351 5775). There will also be a warehouse sale on 13-21 Jan at 6 Relay Road, Ariel Way, off Wood Lane, London W12. Reductions on upholstery, bedding, cushions, rugs and tableware. Fabric and wallpaper only at the warehouse sale.

The General Trading Company
Starts 6 Jan until 27 Jan at 144 Sloane Street, London SW1 (0171-730 0411) and 27 Dec at 10 Angles Street, Bath (01225-461507) and 2-4 Dyer Street, Cirencester (01285-652314). Save up to 30 per cent on this clear-out. Selected cushions reduced from £52.10 to £36.47, quilted cotton bedspreads from £180 to £135 and Kelm stools from £640 to £500.

Head's
Starts 27 Dec at 196 Tottenham Court Road, London W1 (0171-636 1666), 234 King's Road and Tunsgate, Guildford. Look for greatly reduced one-off pieces of furniture that are either shop-soiled, damaged or buyers' samples, along with little luxuries like a Head's hand-made Avon bed (5) reduced from £2,495 to £1,870.

IKEA
Starts 26 Dec at 2 Drury Way, North Circular Road, London NW10 (0181-208 5600) and branches in Croydon, Birmingham, Gateshead, Leeds and Warrington. Up to 50 per cent savings throughout the store including black leather three-seat sofa from £335 to £249. Those with ambitious DIY plans for the new year can save 30 per cent on selected kitchens. The grey high-gloss Abstrakt is down from £1,148 to £804.

Jerry's Home Store
At 163 Fulham Road, SW3; Harvey Nichols, Knightsbridge, SW1; The Bental Centre, Kingston-upon-Thames; 57 Heath Street, Hampstead, NW3. Rather than having a regular sale, Jerry's are promoting particular "Smart Buys" in January and February, reducing the prices of classic American kitchen and home wares. For example, there's 24 per cent off the American Diner "Gibraltar" tumbler (now £2.25), 34 per cent off their white rag rug, now £5.95; 27 per cent off their popcorn popper, now £19.95. Customers are invited to telephone 0171-581 0909 for a catalogue.

Miscellaneous
Starts 28 December, ends 13 January. At Crossways, Church, Farnham, Surrey (01428 714014). Sells decorative bathroom and kitchen objects. Some massive discounts, including marble bathroom suits reduced from £2,500 to £800.

Natural Flooring Direct
Starts 3 January. Sell flooring by mail order from Natural Flooring Direct, PO Box 8104, London SE16 4ZA (0800 454 721). Ten per cent off all stock, plus free fitting, free underlay and free sight survey. For example, coir natural panama reduced from £16.99 sq metre to £15.30; wool bouclé reduced from £20.99 a sq metre to £18.99.

Nice Irma's
Starts 8 Jan at 46 Goudge Street, London W1 (0171-580 6921). Discounts of up to 50 per cent off a large range of iron and brass candlesticks and off selected fabrics. Price of plaid fabric halved to £6.30.

The Pier
Runs from 28 Dec until 21 Jan at stores around the country. Customer inquiries 0171-351 7100. Christmas merchandise is reduced to clear. Other merchandise at half price or less includes china ranges, marble kitchen ware, selected terracotta and a range of vases.

The Pukka Palace
Sale starts 28 December, ends 28

January. Twenty per cent off their Anglo-Indian furniture and accessories, such as leather safari suitcases, solar lamps and iron candlesticks. Pukka Palace, 174 Tower Bridge Road, London SE1 (0171-234 0000).

Purves & Purves
Starts 27 Dec at 80-81 and 83 Tottenham Court Road, London W1 (0171-580 8223). Up to 40 per cent off ex-display and discontinued lines. Special orders will be reduced by 10 per cent on items over £500.

Rhodes Design
Starts 23 December at 65 Cross Street, London N1 (0171-354 9933). Ten per cent off all ranges of mid kitchen furniture, eg 60cm wall cupboards reduced from £195 to £175.50.

SCP
From 6 to 27 January. At 135-139 Curtain Road, London EC2 (0171-739 1869). Designer furniture and accessories by Jasper Morrison, Matthew Hilton, Le Corbusier, Mies Van Der Rohe. Discounts of up to 50 per cent on shop floor models, and 15 per cent off any other furniture ordered during the sale.

Victoria & Albert Museum Shop
Starts 8 January at Cromwell Road, London SW7 (0171-938 8468). Up to 75 per cent off selected lines of replica ceramics, plates, cups and saucers, glassware, goblet and contemporary-style vases. Also 50 per cent off selected items of V&A jewellery and fashion accessories including earrings, brooches, cufflinks, silk waistcoats and ties.

MISCELLANEOUS

The Body Shop
Lasts from 26 Dec until 13 Jan at branches nationwide. Customer services 01903-731500.

Buyers & Sellers
120-122 Ladbroke Grove, London W10 (0171-229 1947). Dial-a-bargain sale of domestic appliances runs from 27 Dec until 31 Jan. The idea is that you name the item - brand, model number and ring up for a sale price quotation. Special offers include Neff built-in dishwashers £189, De Dietrich stainless steel gas hobs £117.

The Charleston Shop and Gallery
Sale 6 and 7 Jan, 12-5pm. Charleston Gallery/Shop, Charleston, near Fife, Levens, East Sussex (01323-811626). Everything will be reduced by 25-50 per cent. Some seconds of Quentin Bell's ceramics will be available to purchase.

Mulberry Hall
Runs 4 Jan until 3 Feb at Stonegate, York (01904-620736). Splash out on famous names such as Wedgwood, Spode and Royal Worcester at discounts of 30 per cent while seconds in Royal Doulton, Minton and Royal Crown Derby are half the normal price. A dinner service for 10 in Spode's 'Chancellor Cobalt' design is reduced from £2,395 to £1,595. A tea set for 10 in the same design is reduced from £1,235 to £825.

Olympus
Now on at 301 Oxford Street, London W1 (0171-409 2619) and at stores nationwide. Discounted goods include the Kastle bike Degree 35 - was £299.99, now £240. Nike ladies' air total body trainers are down from £59.99 to £44.99.

Snow & Rock
Starts 27 Dec through to the end of Jan at 188 Kensington High Street, London W8 (0171-937 0872) and branches nationwide. Savings of 10 per cent off all accessories and selected boots with selected items substantially reduced.

Tridias
From 1 January to 14 February. At 124 Walcott Street, Bath (01225-489455) and OTHER SHOPS. Up to 50 per cent off good quality toys. For example, puppets (theatre reduced from £17.99 to £12.99, wooden timba game from £9.95 to £5.99, crystal radio from £6.95 to £5.95. Postage & packing for mail-order sale items will be reduced to £1.95.



The sensible shopper's sales guide

By Melanie Rickey

Christmas is finally upon us. Phew. Time to sit back, watch some entertaining (if not mind-numbing) reruns of blockbuster movies, eat fancy food, and put the hassle of Christmas shopping behind us.

Or is it? The January sales are just around the corner, and for some avid consumers, the thrill of catching a bargain, or squabbling over the last pair of leather kitten-heeled slingbacks in a size 6, is far too addictive and exciting to pass up.

If you enjoy shopping for clothes and its associated pleasures, you won't be happy shopping during the sales. Sales staff pay little attention to you, the changing rooms in most stores become communal (if they aren't already), and you may be swayed by the price reduction on a garment rather than whether it suits you or not.

The only way to "do the sales" is to go out with what you want firmly in mind and stick to it. A friend of mine set off one year armed with a newly-acquired credit card and was so impressed by the bargains that "sales mania" set in.

She went up to her limit on sales bargains from the likes of Armani, Nicole Farhi and Whistles. But when she got them home, the Nicole Farhi coat was a bit too long, the Whistles suit the wrong shade of brown, and the Armani dress, just a little too tight around the bust.

All in all, a day of fun turned into a day of disaster, as returning sale goods can be a nightmare. Certain stores offer credit notes or exchange on goods returned - this is the policy of Whistles and Nicole Farhi. Armani will refund at the discretion of the management, but few stores give money back unless the goods are damaged.

My friend was lucky, she wasn't stuck with her impulse buys. So take note: it always works to your advantage to ask the manager of the shop you are buying from about their returns policy.

To do the sales the sensible way, take stock of your wardrobe. Check off how many pairs of trousers you own, how many suits, skirts, shirts, coats, and evening dresses - even shoes and casual wear should come under scrutiny. This done, really think about what you wear on a day to day basis. If more than half of your clothes are defunct, sales therapy should give your wardrobe a face lift.

It is best to look for basics. If you need a few new jumpers, sales are great because knitwear is always generously reduced. Good classic suits are always a good buy, as are winter jackets. Never go for a frivolous impulse buy, like a lime-green through split evening dress, go for what you need. Sales staff are always eager to tell you you look a million dollars in something. Remember that the goods on sale are goods the store has been unable to shift thus far.

Three top tips for sales shopping: "If it doesn't feel right, don't buy it, no matter what the sales assistant says." "Check the returns policy of the store before making your purchase." "Look around. You may buy that near-perfect black polo neck at one store, only to find a better version even cheaper somewhere else."

How to spot a really good deal

There are marked-down goods and there are genuine bargains. They are not the same. By Karen Falconer

Did you know that when you visit a post-Christmas sale you may be splashing out on specially bought-in merchandise rather than genuinely reduced goods? Surely not, I hear you cry, convinced that the great tradition of bi-annual sales has not entirely given way to the promotional farce we've come to expect for much of the year. Why would so many people queue and fight if there was nothing substantial to be gained?

The truth is that there are bargains to be had in the sales - end-of-season merchandise, discontinued lines, perhaps even loss leaders - but they may be thinner on the rails than you think. Sales originated as a way of getting rid of last season's stock. But with increasingly good stock control systems in the bigger stores, there is less surplus to sell off. However, the January sales have become almost an institution with consumers, so stores have to virtually create bargains to keep them happy. "Retailers have to provide a feel-good factor for purchases so the consumer can justify it," said Martin Fisher, officer on prices for the Institute of Trading Standards Administration. Sales, he added, together with the enormous signs in shop

windows and hordes of ads shouting about the bargains to be had, are a way of convincing people that they get the best possible deal.

Indeed, for the serious sale shopper, there are seriously good buys to be had. "The people at the front of the queue will have been in the store looking under the brown paper over the previous few days. They will know exactly what they want," said a spokesman for Harrods. "They will have tried on the red Ralph Lauren dress at a 50 per cent mark down and worked out which door is closest to it. The real sale pros will be in and out of the store by 9.10am."

Indeed, most shops offer reductions of up to 50 per cent at the outset of a sale, often increasing the discount as the sale progresses. Fashion is particularly good for reductions as most merchandise cannot be carried over into the new season. In other areas - furnishings, electricals, homeware - mark-downs are less dramatic unless the goods are soiled or being discontinued.

"We start planning our sale in October," a Heals spokeswoman explained. "Normally, our discounts are between 10 and 30 per cent, or 50 per cent if we are trying to clear something. Often, our bargains are



If you want a real bargain, brave the crowds and beware the stack of navy blue pullovers in small, medium and large. Photos: Nicholas Turpin

one-off things, something weird and wonderful, or upholstery that has had 200 people sitting on it."

But, until prices are slashed to about 70 per cent, retailers are still making some profit. A 10 per cent reduction means a handsome profit; 50 per cent means a smaller, but still a hefty one, as the original selling price is often around 150 per cent of the wholesale cost, minus overheads.

Genuine sale bargains are only part of today's sale story. As customer foot-fall increases dramatically (Harrods gets 300,000 people - 10 times its normal amount of shoppers - on the first day of its sale), so

retailers have devised ways to capitalise on this. They buy in merchandise specially for the sales, although how much varies widely from store to store, department to department. It might be slight seconds in glassware or china, end-of-range or unpopular lines in white goods, electrical or audio goods, or bulk-bought jumpers or T-shirts. It's often merchandise offered by manufacturers at a significantly reduced price.

"Bought-in merchandise, which often comes from the Far East, may be lower quality than usual," said Chris Dawson of retail consultancy Management Horizons. "It's

stuff that stores may not be able to stock at full price because of the lesser image."

Mr Fisher puts it more strongly: "I don't feel that the public gets what they think they're getting when they see a sale sign. They expect a real bargain, but products are much more gimmick. There will be shops that run sales in the traditional way but they are increasingly the small independents. Companies run by shareholders have to play to the current market rules."

Buying in special goods is the modern-day sales trend; most of the major high-street players now do it. The problem is that many consumers are not able to, or aware of the need to differentiate between a real bargain and what is nothing more than a cheaper product at a cheaper price. In the general mayhem that sales are, they may snap up goods which otherwise they would not have done. However, there are ways to spot the imposters.

A Code of Practice on Sales goods stipulates that they have to have been on sale at the full price in the store for at least 28 days during the previous six months. Bought-in merchandise obviously has not been and therefore has to be clearly marked as a "special purchase" item, or as reduced from the Recommended

Retail Price (a manufacturer's suggested price which may bear absolutely no relation to what the product could realistically sell for) as opposed to the previous selling price.

There are other tell-tale signs, even without the sign-posting.

"If you have a stack of navy pullovers in small, medium and large," explained Harrods, "it is an indication that you are buying something that has been bought in." Genuine sale goods tend to be one-offs or obscure sizes, or ties with strange prints on them.

It may be that a customer is quite happy to snap up a special purchase product: retailers wouldn't stock them if people didn't buy them. After all, it can be quite handy to purchase a stack of shirts for work, or the extra plates for the kitchen at a cheap price. But, for the genuine bargain hunters, it is worth remembering that most small shops really do have to offload one season's stock before they can buy in the next and, therefore, the mark-downs will be on merchandise they actually sold.

For my money, forget 10 per cent discounts: it's half-price bargains on quality goods that I'm after, and, if they're not there, forget it. I'll take my money home again.



bazaar

Good thing

Boots Fine Foods, from £2.30

In the packaging fest that is Christmas, Boots have done a brave thing. They have wrapped their fine foods - mulled wine set (£2.50), 1lb Christmas pudding with brandy (£4.30) etc - in nothing more than reusable tins and a lick of silver paper or cellophane. In doing so, it has saved 6,000 tonnes of packaging. OK, so their Batman bubble bath is a triumph of plastic over content, but at least they have made an effort. I may even go out and buy a jar of their peach conserve with peach schnapps (£2.30). Purely in the interests of the planet, you understand.



Checkout The Christmas Chapter

The Christmas Chapter, 162 Sloane Street, London SW1

What is it? An off-shoot of Breeds, the upmarket cutlery and china shop in Tunbridge Wells. The Christmas Chapter is a shrine to Christmas. Well, to Christmas decorations. For the past five years, Breeds has turned over its basement to Christmas decorations. The idea has worked so well that this year it opened three other outlets: Sloane Street, Kingston-upon-Thames and the Lakeside Shopping Centre, Thurrock. They stay open until the end of January.

Atmosphere: Slightly weird. It's like walking into a large picture book in which a forest has invaded a house. The shop is filled with themed and decorated trees, and in one corner, a table is set for a casual Christmas lunch (who doesn't have gold baubles delicately placed among their gold rimmed plates and glasses?). Beware the low-flying decorative objects.

Customers: A mixture of well-heeled locals, awe-struck tourists, and the simply curious. Interestingly, there are no children: wise parents leave them elsewhere as one look at all the loot would send them into a frenzy. According to staff, most customers are overwhelmed by the stock. However, they will help gaping customers to create a theme at home and to make up perfect bows with which to dress presents or decorate your tree.

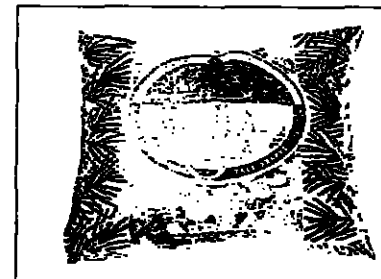
What to buy: The giant golden papier mache angels are a must, if you have money to burn, at £200. Birds with wire feet which twist around the branches of the tree cost £1.95-£4.99 (the white dove is a current best-seller). Bags of glossy red stars or apples £2.95; small teddy bears, rag dolls and soldiers are £3.95 and part of a folk art theme. Patchwork and applique Christmas stockings are £24.95.

Do not buy: Terrifyingly ugly Father Christmas heads which look like they have been pickled - guaranteed to give children nightmares (£1.95).

Mad thing

Christmas tree pasta shapes, £1.66 per packet

You've read everything you can lay your hands on about how to stage-manage the Christmas meal. You've stuffed the turkey or you're boiling a ham; the bread sauce, red cabbage and God only knows what else are on the go, but you've forgotten something: you haven't planned a meal for Christmas Eve. Don't panic. The Funfood Pasta Company has the answer - Christmas tree pasta shapes. Perfect for that last-minute tuna surprise or macaroni cheese. If nothing else, they should



amuse fractious, over-excited children. Stockists: Gill Wing Gift Shop, 194 Upper Street, Islington, London N1 1RO. Selected branches of Tesco (call 01992-632 222 for nearest branch).



Heavy cold, high temperature?



THE LITTLE YELLOW BOX THAT'S A GREAT BIG HELP

ALWAYS READ THE LABEL

*Trade Mark

shopping

Two days to go. Presents? Panic!

Why do you always leave your Christmas shopping to the last minute? Is it fear of death? Low self-esteem? Acute procrastination disorder? That's the theory according to one academic. Whatever the reason, Jim White will be present-hunting in the convenience store again this year

Joseph R Ferrari, of the Centre for Life Studies, Cuzenovia College, New York, has the perfect excuse for not doing his Christmas shopping. "Sorry, honey," he can say. "I was too busy, stuck down the Mall researching why people leave their Christmas shopping to the last minute."

In the land where the works of Madonna have inspired a university degree course, and an intimate knowledge of knitting patterns can land you a doctorate, Dr Ferrari's research has the sniff of real scientific rigour about it. "Christmas and procrastination," is the title of his paper. "Explaining the lack of diligence at a real-world task deadline."

Dr Ferrari examined 240 mall shoppers, measuring "procrastination scores" (on arousal and avoidance measures), the closeness of the measurement to Christmas, and shoppers' rationales for why they were shopping at that particular time. He reckoned procrastinators were "motivated by arousal from working against a deadline and attributed their lack of diligence to job-related attributes (eg work, business commitments) that compelled them to begin shopping at the last possible opportunity." Or they were motivated by a need to "avoid situations involving threats to self-esteem, attributing their postponed shopping to personal attributes (eg lack of energy, indecisiveness, perceived task aversiveness) reflecting their belief in their own inability."

So there we have it. The reason I was standing at 11 o'clock on the evening of one Christmas Eve in a motorway service station, deciding whether my mother would prefer the shameful box of Milk Tray in my right hand or the wilting pot plant in my left was because I was consumed by self-loathing. Nothing to do with the 48-hour bender from which I had just emerged, nothing to do with the car not starting, nothing to do with working for a man who combined the less generous instincts of Scrooge and Grindgrind in one miserly, misanthropic package of a kind which regarded leaving work before five on Christmas Eve as a firing offence.

However, Dr Ferrari does have a point. Since Christmas now begins in the shops the moment the fireworks are put away, there are 50 days in which to



Jim White scans the shelves of Tesco Metro for that special gift

organise a buy-round. There must be a reason why so many of us refrain from doing anything at all about it until the last plausible nano-second. Fear of death is my explanation: a postponement of that which we know is inevitable in the misplaced conviction

that the act of putting it off will somehow prevent it happening. But, like the need to throw up after the office party, in the end there is nothing you can do to stop it happening, so you comfort yourself by waiting until the last possible moment.

The lot of the inveterate last-minuter is helped considerably if you have money. Then you can hit the shops like a credit-card fuelled locust, scooping the gaudy off the shelves with a recklessness that will be regretted only when the bill arrives at the month end.

The shopping areas of airports can be very useful in this regard: who, you wonder, as you pass them by for 363 days of the year, would ever want the shamelessly over-priced, offensively pointless items that abound there? The answer is: on Christmas Eve when

you have so far bought precisely nothing, your family and friends. And best of all, the stuff will gift wrap them. Last year a colleague bought, in the ten-minute window he had at Heathrow before the last Yuletide flight to Belfast was called, a Santa's sack of gifts: saucy underwear from the Knickerbox franchise, Body Shop smellies, a boy's football shirt, and that stalwart of the procrastinator: booze. Lots of it. All was popped on to the credit card, all was scrumptiously wrapped and all was weepingly received by grateful relatives, astonished by the thought and attention lavished upon them.

Penury, though, compounds the adrenalin-rush panic of the last-minute. As a student I can remember standing bemused in 24-hour newsagents debating whether the £2.35 in my pocket would best be served buying the girlfriend's parents the Christmas and New Year copy of The Radio Times, or a jumbo pack of Juicy Fruit; always bearing in mind I had to stretch to procure presents for mum, dad and two siblings as well. Fortunately, then, I'd had the foresight to bag the girlfriend a Salon-sized bottle of Wash 'n' Go from the discount chemist already.

There are people who maintain that waiting until the last minute opens up a huge vista of bargain opportunities: that, after five on Christmas Eve, turkey prices tumble to a penny a pound; that Christmas trees are given away; that street traders pay you to take boxes of Santa hats off their hands. But to discover such giveaways requires the kind of organisation and foresight not familiar to the procrastinator: my experience of the last-minute university involves paying the recommended retail price and above.

And this year, thanks to a change in the law, the disorganised have been given an extension to their deferral. For the first time that Christmas Eve has fallen on a Sunday, we have a whole extra shopping day in which to delay. And if, at 5pm, standing in your local Tesco Metro fumbling with a pot-plant, a Dogs 96 calendar and a festive pine car-freshener you are approached by an academic with a clipboard asking you what you are doing, just ask him a question in response: if he's so clever, when does he do his Christmas shopping?

...but it's not too late to order a thoughtful gift

By Ann Crookenden

Basically, there's now only three-quarters of a shopping day to Christmas. OK, you still have time to make a last-minute dash up the high street, zoom round a motorway service station, or spend half an hour dithering in an off licence, but you are cutting it a bit fine. And, all right, some shops will be opening on Christmas Eve, but do you really want to spend the day in a bad-tempered chase that results in two packs of lavender guest soap and a decorative jar of sun-dried tomatoes? In any case, the person you've forgotten to buy anything for probably lives 200 miles away. So you've had it. Well, no, not quite. Here are some ways the last-minute shopper can still save face.

Gifts

Global Presents Shopping Service will send gifts to addresses in central London up to Christmas Eve. Simply call them up, tell them what kind of thing you want, and they will leaf through their catalogue and find the exact thing. Ideas range from a cashmere scarf from Johnson of Elgin

(£55), a pencil holder made from faux leather book spines (£18), Links teddy bear silver cufflinks (£62), a Wallace & Gromit alarm clock (£26.90), or a Fischer Price Touch and Listen cordless phone for under-threees (£6.99). They also have a good stock of drinks, including liqueurs and malt whisky. Gift wrapping costs £2 extra, but messages are free. Delivery from £3.95. If you're desperate to send something outside London for Christmas, they can arrange it but it will cost - a lot. Call 0171-731 3000 to place an order or message <http://www.shoplondon.co.uk>, on the Internet.

Flowers

Interflora florists will be running out of Madonna lilies and poinsettias but they should be able to rustle up something. And most of them will deliver on Christmas Eve if you ring early today. If you're lucky, they'll be able to do you a Christmas basket of red carnations, fir and holly (£19.95 to £29.95), a box of 18 Belgian chocolates, gift wrapped with a spray

of flowers (£14.95), a planted basket with cyclamen, ivy etc (from £19.50-£27.50). Failing that, you'll have to make do with a bouquet of whatever they've got left. If you call the Interflora Freecall number (0500 434343), they will connect you to your nearest Interflora shop. Alternatively, the central Flowerline (01529 45454) will sort out the order for you. Call today, if possible before lunchtime, for Christmas Eve delivery. Or call on Christmas Eve for deliveries from the 27th.

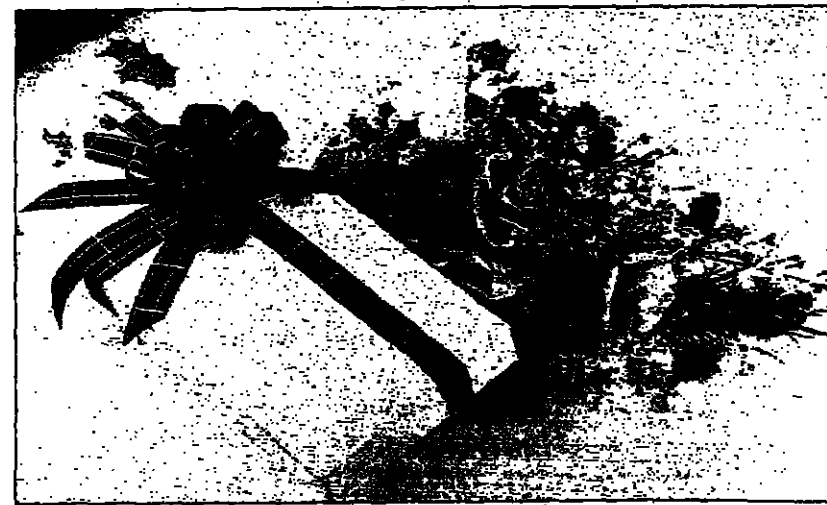
Hampers

It's also not too late to send a hamper, but only to people in London. Unfortunately, if you want it there by Christmas, **Basket Express** does a tempting range: from the £450 Premier Hamper (Bollinger champagne, Glenmorangie malt whisky, silver-plated serving spoons...) to a chocolate basket decorated with festive ribbons, berries and baubles and filled to the brim with Belgian chocolates (from £30). There's also a Boxing Day Breakfast basket (£59.50) or A Taste of

America, India, Italy or France (from £30). Add your own message. Delivery costs about £7/£8. If you want to order something outside London, **Basket Express** will deliver between Christmas and New Year (£12 delivery). Call/fax them on 0171-289 2636.

Too late for Christmas week, but there for New Year:

Drinks Direct: Call today, and you could have a bottle of vintage Veuve Clicquot on a doorstep anywhere in the country on the 27th. There are 1,500 bottles to choose from, or send one of their gift packs. The Croft & Jenga pack (a 10-year-old port in a box with Jenga, the wobbly wooden tower game), would revive flagging festive cheer for £29.99, or the Iona hamper (£35) which includes a 1994 Sauvignon Blanc, a 1993 Petite Sirah, Belgian chocolates, plum pudding, fruit cake, shortbread and more, would help restock a post-Christmas larder. You can add your own message. All parcels are sent by courier, costing from £5.99. Call 0800 232221.



Tesco Direct: Orders can be placed now for courier deliveries on Thursday 28th. Hampers are sold out, but a range of wines is available, and flowers, too. The "Luxury Bouquet" sounds suitably festive: gyp, chrysanthemums, gerbera, carnations, lilies, orchids, for £23.99. Messages included. Call 0800 403 403, 9am-8pm, or fax 01992 644464. Internet: telesales@tesco.e-mail.com

Thorntons Chocopress: Whizzing a box of truffles round in time for new year might also save your skin. Prices from £9.95 (200g of pralines, truffles and mousses) to £36.95 for the 1370g Continental selection (100% chocolates). There's a charge for gift wrapping. The drawback here is that all chocolates travel by post, so they should arrive for New Year if you order before the 27th, but there are no guarantees. Call the ChocLine: 01763 241 444.

the thing about...

Jars of food

Imagine the wails if the delicatessens started selling kelims: if the corner shop started stocking a line in recycled, hand-blown glassware; if you could buy hand-made, cast-iron, hessian covered sofas at Asda. It would be like straying on to God's territory: warnings of unleashing monsters on to the world would abound in the consumer magazines, pressure groups would rattle out dire warnings about job losses, the Conrans would give interviews showing that the quality would be impaired. Food shops sell food; design shops sell design: that is how it should be.

Except that the design shops don't really see it that way. Every good decorative emporium now has a department - or at the very least a chrome-

plated five-tier shelf - stacked with dinky food to grace your kitchen. Not least about these are the olive products. Perhaps this is related to the peculiar British fear of things Mediterranean - it's not so long, after all, since olive oil was something you bought in tiny bottles from the chemist to clear your ear-wax - but things you would expect to find in any old Italian village shop turn up here as luxury designer goods at luxury designer prices. It is in these outlets that you will find your unsullied olive oil with a twig or tarragon or bunch of chilli peppers bobbing around the bottom of it and a glorious Tuscan sunset on the label.

Safeway may have caught up with pesto and dried tomatoes, but they have a long way to go before they stock



Foodie jars: bought by a particular brand of urban person who never cooks

giant jars of marinated olives artfully striped in layers with orange, garlic, silver skin, onions and spices.

The thing about these beautiful food-stuffs, though, is this: who actually buys them? We must all have stood in front of the displays, mouths watering, fantasising about spending upwards of £30 on snacks, but how many of us have reached out and popped one into our baskets?

My theory is that they are bought by that particular urban brand of person who never cooks, but who likes to keep a decorative kitchen nonetheless. The type of people who have other people in for drinks before going out to a restaurant.

These people, who nurture a secret longing to have their house appear in

Country Living, also have bunches of dried herbs and copper pans hanging on old laundry racks suspended from the kitchen ceiling. "Look!" proclaims their interior decor. "I am a busy person and a wealthy one, but really I long for the simple things in life: fresh fruit shared with friends, a bowl of pasta with pine kernels, the smell of new-baked bread..."

So who eats them? Well, no one, at least at the outset. These are for decoration as much as for consumption. Once the Umbrian scene on the label has been obscured by grease from the gas ring and splashes from the espresso machine, then perhaps the bottle will be replaced in the next-to-cooker display rack, opened and consigned to the cupboard for salad-making. But it's

rare that these beauties get eaten at their best, when they're still fresh. As for the marinating jars, they'll sit casually on a side somewhere until the next party, when the local dipso spots them, cries "Ah, olives!" and pops the seal on the top.

Of course, they also make great non-contentious presents. Presents to give to the unexpected guest that no one warned you about. Gifts to take to partners' mothers. Gifts that say that you're a person of good taste and the recipient is a person of culinary discernment. This is a good time of year for sales of tarty oils, as it is a good time for posh soap. After all, both are better than a pair of socks.

Serena Mackie

It's OK, admit it, you were watching television



It's lonely being a TV critic. Pitiful, some might say. But this year Thomas Sutcliffe, our chief reviewer, can hold his head high



Television that stirred the nation: OJ Simpson's circus parade of a trial; *Brookside's* unearthing of the body under the patio; Diana enlisting 21 million into her personal therapy circle

Watching television has never been an entirely respectable activity. As a television critic this is borne in upon you with particular force, because of the gloomy knowledge that the activity to which you devote a large portion of your waking hours constitutes, for many people, a simple shorthand for mental vacancy. Two recent examples come to mind. The first occurred in the context of an industrial accident hearing, considering compensation for a man who had a red-hot metal bar lodged in his brain (he was forced to pull it out himself, a grisly scene which we can no doubt look forward to seeing reconstructed on 999). His lawyer argued that before the accident his client had been a useful member of society, a figure of ambition and drive; now, he told the court, silk handkerchief dabbing at his eyes, the poor man was reduced to watching television all day. The second turned up in this week's television profile of the comedian Peter Cook, a man who began with smart London society at his feet and finished by amassing an unmatched knowledge of obscure cable channels. It was one thing to appear on bad television programmes, it was suggested, quite another thing to watch them. The glowing membrane of the screen effects a moral osmosis, sucking merit from those who merely watch and transferring it to the glittering creatures who are watched.

Such moments are rare these days – but that wasn't the only occasion in 1995 when television forced people to abandon their own timetables for those of the broadcasters. Even in Britain, the end of the OJ trial made office workers huddle round the nearest screen, arrested by the pay-off to the year's most extended soap storyline. Even in Britain, largely protected from the twitchy derangement of round-the-clock coverage, the arrival of the verdict was a moment of signal drama, which left more than a few viewers feeling shaken in a way they couldn't quite account for. The clichéd phrase about "all eyes being on you" came close to a dull statement of the facts.

For many commentators, the real guilty party in the end was television itself, culpable of transforming justice into a game-show, sully the truth by mounting a shameless auction for pieces of it. I was less convinced myself – the great revelation of the Simpson trial (made unignorable by the circus parade that surrounded it) may have been unpalatable but it was also overdue. A crack had been widening in the national foundations and suddenly someone threw open the cellar door and let the light in.

I'm not fanciful enough to believe that American television will do much to make good the damage, but it is inaccu-

rate to see it as causing it in the first place. What's more, though television proved an efficient conductor of base motives and crude prejudices, it also provided its own antidote. There was a certain oddity in the sight of broadsheet papers, perfectly happy to summarise coverage themselves, inveighing against the pernicious misrepresentation of broadcasting the evidence in its tedious, pickier entirety.

Nothing else in the year could hope to match the intensity of those two television moments – though there were other interviews and other trials that commanded our conversations. In June, Mrs Thatcher gave an audience to David Frost, reminding us of her ability to swoop instantly from beatific condescension to low junk-yard growl. She would not be returning, she said, unless her country called for her, the Maid of Grantham, in some great national emergency. The words came out soft and husky, stroking the interviewer as if he had an angora fur and was curled up in her lap. Earlier in the year, *Brookside* had finally bowed to the physics of patio burial – the infallible rule that what goes down must come up – and disinterred Trevor Jordache in a five-episode special that ran every night of the week. It was one of those storylines that make a spark leap between life and fiction, like the sudden jolt of tin foil on a filling – women's groups demonstrated outside the offices of Merseyside Television, the production company which makes *Brookside*, and battered women wrote in their hundreds to the actress who plays Mandy Jordache.

There was much else that was memorable in the year, of course – dramas such as *Jake's Progress* and *Les Blair's Bliss*, a remarkably consistent run of observational documentaries from *Modern Times*, excellent one-off comedies from Andy Hamilton and the distinguished historical journalism of *The Death of Yugoslavia*. But where those programmes set people talking, they did so in small parishes of the national consciousness, parishes bounded by class or occupation. There are times when television can break those barriers, times when watching television isn't so much a sad demonstration of inadequacy but a participation in a national gathering.

reviews

TELEVISION Farm Fantasia (C4)

Four legs good, two legs dreadful. Jasper Rees cringes on behalf of humanity at a 'multi species' *Sleeping Beauty*

As a critic, you are often castigated for mocking too quickly. Occasionally, though, you're given very little room for manoeuvre. When a documentary about a ballet starring farmyard animals crops up, it's a case of mock or be mocked. And for once, you can mock with a conscience cleared by the fact that the target, an animal behaviourist, eco-farmer and full-time fruitcake, has a hide of reinforced rhinoceros.

Farm Fantasia snooped at preparations for the performance of a "multi-species" *Sleeping Beauty* on a farm near Dartmoor. The good fairy was played by a spaniel, the wicked witch by a cat. Sundry llamas pranced about in something approximating to unison. A pair of horses lay down and went to sleep, apparently as instructed but possibly making a valid and spontaneous critique. A monstrous bull called Castor, so named presumably because of the size of his poll, played the king. And a couple of humans were roped in from the professional dance world, doubtless lured by the prospect of

television exposure from which, it transpires, their careers may never recover.

Their choreographer was Marthe Kiley-Worthington, who lavished all her directorial ingenuity on the quadruped performers and slung comically vague instructions at their two-legged colleagues: "Now you two lie down, or a lift or something." The word "eccentric", conventionally used on these occasions, is pitifully inadequate when it comes to describing her ideas about encouraging animals to express themselves. Her plan is to engender an art-form that the more professionally minded will take up.

They say that no man is an island, but meet a woman who is. She inhabits a kind of boggy paradise that she has both imagined and subdued, where man, animal and machine do the work, while woman devises dance steps for Andean pack-mammals. Marthe by name, her nature is to make others martyrs to her art.

Such machinery as there was on the farm was mostly prelapsarian. The straw for a new thatch was threshed by a hurdy-

gurdy that was less Heath Robinson and more Robinson Crusoe. There was a tractor, but Mrs Kiley-Worthington confessed that she had avoided learning to operate it. This chore fell to her partner Chris. Your fairly standard loopy longbeard, he was a comparatively earthbound onlooker who moaned blamelessly. "Why's it always the bloke who has to drive the tractor?" Some stereotypical roles in this particular animal kingdom are clearly immutable.

The voice-over tried to keep a straight face, but couldn't quite mask a snigger. As the film quietly pointed out, through images of sheep being shepherded and cattle being herded, it's possible for humankind to choreograph large groups of animals without roping in Tchaikovsky. If the well of human knowledge has been enlarged by this daft project in one indisputable way, it is because that hole in the dictionary where the collective noun for a group of llamas should be has now been filled. For future reference, it's a *corps de llamas*.

CLASSICAL Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment (QEH, London)

Adrian Jack listens with fresh ears to a trio of 150-year-old scores brought back to new life by the sound of period instruments

Franz Berwald's *Sinfonie singulière* fused to be heard quite often on the radio, but Wednesday night offered a rare concert performance, in which Paavo Järvi, son of Neeme, conducted the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. All the music in the programme belonged to the 1840s. Berwald was born in Stockholm, the year before Schubert, though he outlived him by 40 years. His *Sinfonie singulière* has a lot of the breezy classical radiance of Schubert's earlier symphonies without their tunefulness. In the first movement, there's also a brief blaze of woodwind and brass that hints at a less extravagant Berlioz; more fancifully speaking, it has an open-air quality that pre-echoes Carl Nielsen.

Berwald's orchestration is very clear, and though there's an elusive, understated quality about his actual invention, his musical argument is lucid, sometimes highlighted by abrupt little motifs like punctuation marks. The symphony's middle movement is a Scherzo with an extended slow introduction and epi-

logue, deftly devised. Singular it certainly is – Berwald seems to have been happily free of the post-Beethoven inferiority complex – and the music sounded marvellously fresh on period instruments.

It wasn't so easy to create the same sense of newness in Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto. The soloist, Thomas Zehetmair, evidently wanted a more rugged approach than usual and tugged at phrases rather wilfully – Mendelssohn's fully composed cadenza in the first movement became almost unrecognisable. Both soloist and conductor pushed the central Andante rather ungracefully along, while the normally skittering finale was a bit on the slow side and trotted rather tamely. Not a complete success, but at least this unassuming performance made you listen.

But with Schumann's Second Symphony, after the interval, Järvi levelled up the score. All Schumann's symphonies have been greatly underrated by critical convention, and the Second particularly so. Wednesday's lucid perfor-

mance, with straight, valved trumpets that looked a bit like giant safety-pins, and really woody-sounding woodwind, as well as light kettledrums played with hard sticks, proved that there is nothing wrong with Schumann's much-maligned orchestration.

My only misgiving concerned a lack of definition in some important cellos lines in the first movement, at least as played here. And really, the orchestra did not need to shatter the atmosphere with a burst of noisy tuning before the Scherzo second movement. In the first of its two trio sections, Järvi controlled the fluctuating speeds with particular aplomb, and far more decisively than usual. The woodwind came into their own in the relay of little solos Schumann gives them in the glorious slow movement – rather analytical-sounding in this performance. Oddly enough in the finale, the first clarinet, sailing in with his inspirational new phrase, was a bit too quiet; but otherwise, there was nothing wanting in the sense of Schumann's hard-won triumph.

THE WEEK IN REVIEW
David Benedict

THE COMEDY
PRIVATES ON PARADE

overview

A revival of Peter Nichols's sharply satirical 1977 play about a military song and dance troupe in Malaya in 1948, starring Tony Slattery and Nicholas Le Prevost.

critical view

Paul Taylor's qualified gratitude. "The Vera Lynn take-off puts you more in mind of Jessie Matthews as imitated by Nellie the Elephant." "I laughed often and freely," admitted the *Times*. Le Prevost was highly praised; the production, according to the *Telegraph*, needed "more pizzazz, and if only Tony Slattery were a more likeable performer." "Wickedly funny," trumpeted the *FT*.

on view

Greenwich Theatre, London: 0181-858-7755. Booking to 2 Feb, followed by a national tour.

our view

A larky alternative to parrot. Great script, bit of a shame about the production.

THE FILM
ACE VENTURA 2: WHEN NATURE CALLS

Jim Carrey, realising that there's more where that came from, returns in his guise as the hyperactive pet detective-majoring in exaggeration but with little hope of Mensa membership.

critical view

Adam Mars-Jones didn't mince words. "Worth 90 minutes of your time? No." He was not alone. "Strangely mirthless," said the *Guardian*. "Mean-spirited," agreed the *Times*. "Inane, indulgent... as infantile, unoriginal, and depressingly crass as its title." "Two pre-teen boys sitting behind me at the press screening soon subsided into bored silence. The absolute pits," declared *Time Out*.

on view

At every possible cinema near you this Christmas.

our view

I think not. Parents, grandparents and the like, see the lovingly directed *The Indian in the Cupboard* or *Babe* instead.

THE GIG
SIMPLY RED

Big hits, big tours, big money: 10 years on from their first single, high-pitched Mick Hucknall and the lads are selling albums by the lorryload and showing little sign of wear and tear.

critical view

Glyn Brown felt that "Mick Hucknall on his present form is hard to beat." "One of the best bands to enliven a British stage this year..." A must-see for fans. Simply Red – the band and the man – are on a devastating form, cheered the *Times*. "Love him or loathe him, it has to be said that when Mick Hucknall puts on a show, he does it in style," approved the *Telegraph*.

on view

The tour resumes on 4 Jan in Birmingham, Glasgow, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield and London. For details call 0891 615477.

our view

A new rhythm section and a highly professional staging to make sure you get your money's worth.

THE PLAY
TRAINSPOTTING

Irvine Welsh's novel about the highs and lows of Scottish junkies, dramatised and directed by Harry Gibson who turned it into a sell-out on a UK tour and won cult status at the Edinburgh Festival.

critical view

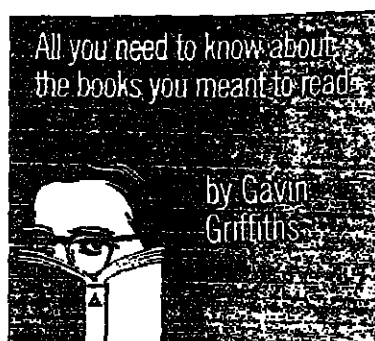
Adrian Turpin found the acting "faultless" and the play "almost shockingly light-hearted" yet "something less than a fully realised play." "Without the empathy and enlightenment that drama can uniquely provide," agreed the *Guardian*. "One of the most remarkable productions of the year," announced the *Telegraph*. "A thrilling, pungent, dazzlingly acted affair," cheered *Time Out*.

on view

At the Ambassadors Theatre, London WC2 (0171-836 6111) to 27 Jan.

our view

Not for the squeamish. The makers of *Shallow Grave* have filmed it for release in January. Will it be the same as actually witnessing it live?



This week:

A CHRISTMAS CAROL (1843)
by Charles Dickens

Plot: With Scrooge, Dickens moulded a figure of mythic proportions; he also put the finishing touches to the modern concept of Christmas as a cosy exhibition of communal gluttony.

It is Christmas Eve. Scrooge loves money and hates people; he rejects the friendship of his nephew and refuses charity to the poor. "Solitary as an oyster," he wants to be left alone, believing social responsibility ends with the payment of taxes.

The ghost of his dead business partner appears to him: Marley is compelled to wander the earth chained to the boxes of cash that he had forged in life; his punishment is that he is helpless to relieve the human suffering around him. If Scrooge is to evade a similar fate, he must follow the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future who are to lead him to self-knowledge.

Christmas Past shows Scrooge to have been a neglected child; this results in an inability to love as an adult. Scrooge turns away from the affections of a young woman who subsequently marries and has dozens of children. The joys of family life are not to be his.

Christmas Present offers a panoramic vision of Christmas celebrated across the country, from lighthouse keepers to Scrooge's clerk Bob Cratchit, his wife, and litter of little Cratchits, including Tiny Tim. Finally Scrooge is exposed to the terrifying allegorical children, Ignorance and Want.

Christmas Future puts Scrooge onto the trail of a mysterious stranger who was universally reviled in life and is now treated with contempt in death. His weather-beaten grave-stone stands unimpaired: on it is carved "Ebenezer Scrooge." As Scrooge reads his future, he faints.

He wakes up. It is only Christmas morning. A changed character, Scrooge becomes a merry old gent with a twinkle in his eye, dispensing money and mirth with equal liberality.

Theme: The individual is personally responsible for fighting social wrongs. It is not enough to pay taxes and hope that a new Law and Order bill will send the troublesome poor to prison.

Christmas Day is a gesture of hope; for one day of the year, family and friends come together and eat, drink and dance to demonstrate how enjoyable life can be. Sensuality and spirituality need not be perpetual antagonists.

Style: A unique combination of ghost story, fairy tale, allegory and bitter social commentary yoked together by the poetry of the grotesque: Marley's ghastly face glows "like a bad lobster in a dark cellar"; Mrs Fezziwig's calves, when dancing, "shone like moons".

Chief strengths: This book is a masterpiece of compression. In a few lines Scrooge is established as a monster who dares to articulate the repressed spitefulness of Everyman: "every idiot who goes about with Merry Christmas on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through his breast." The sentiments may be repulsive, but Scrooge's pungent humour is attractive.

Chief weakness: Dickens tries too hard to squeeze the last dross; it takes a strong constitution to stomach Tiny Tim.

What they thought of it then: 6,000 copies were sold in a trice and it was described as a "national institution"; on the strength of one reading, Carlyle nipped out and bought a turkey.

What we think of it now: Much read but largely underrated. The weirdness of the story is usually forgotten, displaced by accusations of sentimentality. In fact, Dickens holds the unique mixture in magical suspension.

Responsible for: Numerous adaptations, including Disney's version where Donald Duck plays Scrooge, Mickey Mouse, Cratchit. This tumbling together of Victorian and contemporary cultural icons should excite the Barthes division of the postmodernist brigade.

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The magical age of knights and dragons

Jan Morris salutes her fellow Welsh patriot, the medieval rebel, Owain Glyn Dwr

The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dwr by R.R. Davies, Oxford, £20

In 1931, Oxford University Press published a book about the 14th-century Welsh rebel Owain Glyn Dwr which has remained the classic work on the subject to this day. Its author was Professor J.E. Lloyd, the most eminent Welsh historian of the time, who was impelled in his work, so the D.N.B. tells us, by "a robust national feeling". The book was 161 pages long, was printed in generous type on handsome paper, and was instinct with old-school Welsh pride, plus perhaps a touch of the grand – if sometimes windy – enthusiasm that we like to call *hynf*. Glyn Dwr, said its concluding line, "may with propriety be called the father of modern Welsh nationalism", and Professor Lloyd's book has been beloved of Welsh patriots ever since.

Sixty-four years later, here comes Oxford with its successor at last, written by the Chichele Professor of Medieval History at All Souls. What a difference! Professor Davies's work is more than twice as long and in a typeface half the size. It is empowered by all the resources of modern scholarship, and is testimony to the transformation that has overcome Welsh historiography in the past half-century. No robust national bias here. This is history at its most professional, thorough and disinterested.

Davies, who was until recently Professor of Modern History at Aberystwyth, has already written famously about the Wales of Glyn Dwr's time, but he admits that like Lloyd before him he has discovered no new evidence about the rebel as a man. In particular, it remains an enigma where and how far, as we romantics would say, if Glyn Dwr died, after the decade of his rebellion against English rule. But what this book does is to set the familiar story in an altogether new richness of

context, placing medieval Wales itself in its proper relationship with England and with Europe. Davies's range of knowledge and reference is astonishing, his detailed examples (life in Kidwelly, for instance, during the rebellion) are often fascinating, and, absorbing as it does all the academic research that has been accomplished since Lloyd's day, his work adds up to a totally fresh approach to the old romance.

The book opens imaginatively with two fanciful journeys through 14th-century Wales. The first is made by an official of the King's administration, passing from one outpost of the English Establishment to another, mostly on the coast; the second is made by a professional Welsh poet moving among the semi-private, half-parallel society of the indigenous Welsh, mostly in the back-country. So different are their two excursions, passing among such alien societies, that they might almost be happening in separate countries, yet their routes never diverge by many miles; and this juxtaposition of conqueror and conquered, sometimes overlapping, sometimes just rubbing along, sometimes hostile, is the key to the whole story.

Glyn Dwr himself was English-educated, and had fought for the King of England against the Scots. Many Welsh leaders opposed him. He had English allies and lieutenants. Yet by the time his rebellion petered out it was generally recognized as being a war between the Welsh and the English. Glyn Dwr had succeeded in coalescing the disorientated conglomeration of traditional loyalties that was Welsh Wales into something like a true sovereignty. Relations between the two peoples had been shattered, severe racial laws had been introduced in reprisal by the Eng-

lish, and it might well be said, though Professor Davies doesn't, that things in Wales were never to be the same again.

Davies tells us clearly how all this came about – the combination of conspiratorial politics, dynastic pretensions, vatic mysticism, guerrilla skill, nationalist vision and undoubted personal charisma which enabled Glyn Dwr to establish such an ascendancy over his volatile compatriots, and to polarize their emotions. We learn about his lofty aims – national self-rule, of course, national universities, ecclesiastical autonomy. We hear about all the skilful-scramble stuff that Shakespeare's Hotspur mocked, immemorial prophecies, portentous folk-lore, dragons and moldworts too. And there is a splendid epilogue in which Professor Davies pulls it all together, the legacy of the fighting, the effects of the rising upon the subsequent history of Wales. Glyn Dwr's elevation into mythical status and his recreation as a nationalist champion.

It is not revisionary or debunking history, but it is a world away from Lloyd's little book of long ago. It is a wonderfully learned and enlightened survey of one corner of Europe at a particularly significant moment of its history. But as a Welshman himself – and from Glyn Dwr's own part of the country, too – Professor Davies will forgive me, I know, if I say that his superb book can never quite replace its predecessor of 1931. It is like a paradigm of Wales itself. What has been gained in knowledge, reason and technique has somehow been lost in magic. There was more *hynf* in the very type-face of the Thirties, and if scholars and researchers from now on will inevitably turn to Davies, old-fashioned patriots like me will still be rereading Lloyd in our baths.



Move over, Sister Wendy. The Rt Rev Richard Harries, Bishop of Oxford, has his sights on ousting you as the nation's favourite religious aesthete. But don't worry. His "devotional reflections on the Christmas story in art" (*A Gallery of Reflections: The Nativity of Christ*, Lion, £8.99) are sadly pedestrian. Botticelli's *Mystic Nativity* makes him regret the Church's lack of enthusiasm for liturgical dance (can we expect to see jiving in the aisles of Christ Church Cathedral?). A pair of midwives in a Russian icon lead him to the view that "We need to

maximize what we spend on pre-school provision of merry kind." Luckily, the pictures are able to speak for themselves. In this volume and companion *Visitation* by the 15th-century German painter Ruckard Froment the Elder (above) the Virgin, pregnant with Christ, meets St Elizabeth, pregnant with John the Baptist. A relatively rare subject in art, the Visitation has inspired some comic-strip absurdities, with the unborn babies waving woodenly at one another from their mothers' wombs, but this version has an unusual humanity and grace.

Ambridge amours

An 'Archers' addict confesses. By Sue Gaisford

Shula's Story by Joanna Toye, BBC Books, £9.99

What do Pedro from Spain, Nick Wearing and Charles Hodgson have in common? No idea? How about Robin Catchpole, Martin Lambert and Bill Morrison? Getting warmer? Try Neil Carter, Nigel Forgetter, Simon Pemberton and Mark Heddon. If you have ever listened to Radio 4's best-loved and longest-running soap, you must be there by now. Yes, they have all been in love with Shula. Shula is the golden girl of *The Archers*, victim of a thousand disasters, whose lambent beauty and indomitable courage have enslaved these men, and millions of enraptured listeners, through a good 20 years of devotion.

Such a heroine deserves special attention and now she has acquired her own book. It is extraordinary. You can't call it a novel, though it is undoubtedly fiction. Nor is it strictly biography – for the same reason. It is really a kind of historical romance, firmly based on life in Ambridge, but decorated with visual details.

You could certainly agree with the clothes in which Joanna Toye dresses the cast. It is highly likely that the elegant Caroline Bone, when confronted with the prospect of having to accompany Shula into labour, would cast about for some Jasper Contan splash-proof co-ordinates to slip into. And of course Jennifer Aldridge, the rich farmer's wife with literary pretensions, would wear a silk scarf with her Puffa jacket. But would Jennifer really offer her distraught daughter some Florentines "still warm from the oven"? Come along, if they were really warm, the chocolate would be runny. Even Jennifer should know that. Still, Toye hits a fine authentic note with her description of the ghastly Bunty Heddon's lounge, with its matching salmon-pink soft furnishings and its gas log-effect fire.

When you read this kind of thing, you catch yourself wondering if she made it up or did Shula herself describe the room, in a rare bitchy moment that you might have missed on air. An invaluable companion to Toye's book is *The Book of the Archers* (Michael Joseph, £9.99), written by three of its longest serving actors, which offers encyclopaedic information about its 44 years of existence. As Toye describes the night when Shula, amazingly, lost her virginity to creepy Simon Parker in a Netherbourne cornfield, a glance at this Bible will immediately inform you that yes, it really did happen, back in 1977. Shula, now a dewy combination of Doris Day and Delia Smith, was once a right little goer. My goodness, she even kissed Tim Beccham. She even smoked. But that was all long ago. Nearly half Toye's book is taken up with the recent problems of Shula's fertility. Here you can re-live the agony of her ectopic pregnancy, her decision to try for IVF treatment, its initial failure and subsequent success, with added lurid details about her – hang on a moment while I spell this – hysterical alpacas. You can suffer again through the terrible night of her husband's sudden death, though you can also remember what an almighty bore he was, despite the fact that he read the *Independent*. In this chapter, you are irresistibly reminded of the stupendous acting of Judy Bennett that had millions of us weeping in cars and kitchens at his loss.

And, reader, I'm ashamed to say that I wept again, though whether my tears sprang from the memory of that performance or from the skill of Joanna Toye in retelling the story, it is impossible to say. And here's the problem with reviewing such a book. Faithful listeners will sigh at the suppression of vast chunks of plot, and quibble over details. We may pine for a glimpse of the permanently plastered Forgetters or of lush Lilian, but we are grateful for the chance to wallow again in all the drama of the life of Ambridge's resident saint. Anyone who had never heard of the place – if such a person exists – might well enjoy it as a slightly implausible novel, but he would miss so much. Only a hardened addict could appreciate the fact that the magnificently frightful Lynda Snell is mentioned only once, and that as a figment of Shula's nightmares.

Paperbacks

Reviewed by Emma Hagestadt and Christopher Hirst



Clapton by Christopher Sandford (Gollancz, £9.99)

A revealing biography of the adept businessman who has built up a vast middle-of-the-road audience. Clapton emerges as unpleasant until forsaking drink in 1987. He has since shown staying power in the face of tragedy, but remains elusive. A lasting relationship seems beyond him – though he's not short of high-glam pals: Pfeiffer, Helvin, Kensit and, inevitably, Princess Di.



Being Human by Mary and John Gribben (Phoenix, £6.99)

In the middle of the Oligocene, when beavers were as big as bears and stags as tall as houses, human beings were no more than a sparkle in a hairy primate's eye. Mary and John Gribben's sociobiological explanation of life on earth decodes such mysteries as why humans cry salty tears, glaciers melt and six per cent of us are born with tails.



The Golden Warrior by Lawrence James (Abacus, £9.99)

This lucid portrait of T.E. Lawrence probes the shimmering myth which he and others fabricated. Obsessed by chivalry since childhood, he was a brave, if ruthless, soldier. More conventional (and eight inches shorter) than his filmic image, he remains profoundly odd. James dismisses his allegations of sexual abuse by the Turks as an invention of his "Uranian muse".



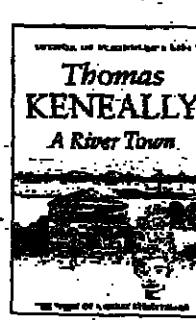
The Penguin Book of Infidelities by Stephen Brook (£8.99)

"My God, I'm doing it with Madame Bovary!" Kugelmass whispered to himself. "Me, who failed freshman English." Projected into his favourite novel, the hero of Woody Allen's most famous short story gets to meet literature's best known adulteress face to face. This exuberant anthology offers little to comfort the cuckold.



Kairos by Gwyneth Jones (Gollancz, £5.99)

This early work by a now established sci-fi writer recalls Michael Moorcock and Angela Carter. Set in a freezing August in the near future (the book predates global warming), Otto (female) and Luci (male) roam a nightmare landscape, pursued by killer angels. "Don't touch me, I'm made of plutonium," one character remarks, which is hard to beat as a conversation stopper.



A River Town by Thomas Keneally (Sceptre, £5.99)

The author of *Schindler's Ark* has a nose for the primitive. His latest novel tells the story of small-town Australia at the turn of the century: a place where little girls have "hardened hands", pigs feed off corpses, and murder-victims' heads are picked in jars. A beautifully written novel about an Irish immigrant who learns that the new world isn't much better than the old.

country

A working Christmas in Wales

The small Welsh border settlement of Montgomery has been described as a town which time forgot. Founded in 1227, it managed to avoid many of the upheavals of the next seven centuries. It was bypassed by the railways and subsequently by the canals. Today it is only dissected by a winding, mud-spattered road. This isolation has prevented it becoming a haven for commuters and has enabled it to retain its sense of community. Many believe it is one of the last unspoilt towns in



Wales, which may be why a few years ago a BBC crew chose to shoot much of "A Child's Christmas in Wales" here. At first glance, the town seems tranquil, sleepy even. Sheepdogs lollop across the cobbles in the quiet main street. Shop doorbells tinkle as elderly women leave laden with bags. But behind Montgomery's sedate appearance is a flurry of activity. For the town's hoteliers, farmers, vets and GPs it is the busiest time of year...

By Matthew Brace



Dr John Wynn-Jones, GP

"I'll be on call this Christmas. I do three Christmases out of every four. I've got about 7,000 patients in the practice area, so things can get quite busy. Every year we have a flu epidemic, so you have to be prepared for that. Christmases have got busier and busier and I think that's connected to the commercialisation of Christmas. People put so much into Christmas now, financially and emotionally, because so much is expected. Buying the best presents, the best trees. I'm not being bitter about this, but all these things can add up to people's stress."

"I do feel that country people seem genuinely upset about calling you out at Christmas. They're always very apologetic. But that's what this town is like. It's human. People feel human living here."

"I think Dylan Thomas would have liked Montgomery. I can just see him holding forth at the bar in the Dragon, making fun of the Welsh. This place is full of characters. One Christmas Day I went down to the surgery and set the alarms off by mistake. The police arrived and I said how sorry I was for troubling them. One policeman said: 'Oh, don't upset yourself doc, as a matter of fact I've got this terrible ear ache, you couldn't look at it for me could you?'"

"I'm the rural medical advisor for *The Archers*, so that keeps me busy, too. I remember one of my first Christmases doing this. I had to advise on a storyline about Mike the milkman who was severely depressed after his marriage break-up. Everyone thought that he would commit suicide on Christmas Day, but in the end he didn't. It was quite a big story, that."

Mark Michaels, hotel owner

"It's going to be busy this year. We're fully booked. Christmas and New Year."

"This is always our busiest time of year, and I think it's my favourite as well. Christmas comes to us, you could say. You get to see all Montgomery's wonderful characters in the bar if you're here around Christmas time. Someone once said every place has its village idiot, but Montgomery seems to have six. The bar is very busy most nights with carol singers, local people from the town or those who are just visiting."

"We get people from all over the country - London, Scotland - and a lot of them are return guests. Over this New Year, 80 per cent of them will have been here before. We are usually the last stop for people on New Year's Eve, because then they go outside and link arms around the Town Hall for Auld Lang Syne at midnight."

"We have to plan Christmas Day quite carefully. My wife and I and our two daughters have breakfast first, then the guests, then it's time to open our presents, then on with the lunch... It's quite hectic and it's very much a full working day. We've got to make sure the staff get off early to go and have their Christmases too."

"My wife and I are both from London originally, so Montgomery was quite different at first, especially at this time of year. Much more relaxed. It's a very special place. It's slower in the caring sense, in that we've got time for other people, but it's not slower in a boring rural sense."

Frances Butler, vet

"Christmas varies when you're working - sometimes it's really quiet, other times you can be rushing around. When I work over Christmas I stay by the phones to take the calls. You can be out in the car for most of the day."

"We can get a lot of sick dogs over Christmas because they've been eating the chocolates off the tree. There's a chemical in some chocolate that can kill them. I've had to put dogs down over Christmas, which is not very nice. But generally there tends to be more common sense in the countryside about pets than you might find in the big towns."

"One of the worst things about working at Christmas for me is that I can't do my carol singing. I sing alto in the church choir, but it makes it a bit difficult getting to rehearsals and services when you're on duty. The rector's very good though. I brought my mobile phone in to church once. I felt really bad sitting there in my pew with it, but it only went off once."

"I remember my first Christmas here. I'm not one for going into pubs on my own, but here I was made to feel really welcome. Christmas is like that here. For a lot of people, especially those who don't get out much, it might be the only time they see a lot of their friends in a year. I'm sure a lot of odd things go on around here at Christmas as well, but it's the men who'll know about them, the naughty stories. There's a certain aspect of rural courtesy here which means that women don't get told the more risky stories."

Ted Edwards, dairy farmer

"We're usually up and milking by 5am on Christmas morning. We've got a dairy farm here, a 56-acre smallholding, and we've been here 20 years, so we're used to getting up early in the morning."

"Usually the milk tanker comes at about 6am, but on Christmas morning the tanker driver wants to get home for his lunch, so he comes even earlier. That early start means you have to take it a bit easy on Christmas Eve and get to bed at a good time."

"One Christmas it was so icy we had trouble getting the tanker up the drive. Took us three quarters of an hour because it was slipping and sliding so much. We could have stayed in bed. Christmas is a special time for me. We go to our Chapel on Christmas morning after the first milking and then come back for lunch. My son and daughter come home, which is nice. It's always been a family day - I wouldn't want it any different. I've never wanted to go away for Christmas. Wouldn't seem right."

"Montgomery is like that, a family place with an atmosphere of togetherness. You've got your rogues, like any place but mainly it's a good town - the odd poacher."

"One year we had a calf born here on the farm on Christmas Day. It was quite a surprise, but it brought the Christmas message closer to home. It was a Christmas present I suppose."

"I miss the Christmases I had when I was young. We would do all our own plucking and feathering and take in birds from our neighbours. There was so many feathers floating about, you had to strain your cups of tea so you didn't get down in your mouth."

Ted Edwards tends his flock, left: On Christmas morning the milk tanker man wants to get home for his lunch, so he comes even earlier than usual. Top: Montgomery, used as the model for the BBC's 'Child's Christmas in Wales' Photographs: John Potter/Newsteam (top) and Matthew Brace

Billy built a circular summerhouse, which became known as Gran's cage, and in this the old lady sat with her knitting, while Tara prowled free outside

At Tiger Haven, on the border of India and Nepal, they will be celebrating Christmas much as we are. Billy Arjan Singh - big cat specialist extraordinaire - is a bachelor, but his tribe has gathered at his white house on the edge of the jungle, and because the family has English connections, proceedings strike a strongly western note. A blazing log fire in the sitting room will banish the chill of the Indian winter: a tree will be decorated, and Father Christmas, in full regalia, and fortified by a peg or two of whisky, will distribute presents to the children after cards and supper. One notable absentee will be the traditional dish of roast peacock, for the birds are now protected - and perhaps it is just as well that goose will fill the bill, because Billy's tame peacock Tom Dooley, which struts about outside, might take a dim view of any reversion to barbaric customs. My thoughts were sent winging to Tiger Haven by a television programme about



DUFF HART-DAVIS

John Aspinall's attempts to reintroduce gorillas to the rain forest of Central Africa. The experiment - as courageous as it was expensive - ended in partial success. Three of the six animals released succumbed to disease brought on by stress, but the others took to the forest eagerly and, when last filmed, were doing well. Yet at the end of the programme came a chilling statistic - that during the time the film was being made, at least 900 other gorillas had been killed.

There is a close parallel between Aspinall's work with

apes and that done by Arjan Singh with Tara, a tigress, during the 1970s. At a time when India's stock of tigers had sunk to its lowest ebb, Billy imported a cub from England and brought it up in and around his house, determined to prove that when the animal grew to maturity, its inbred instincts would assert themselves, and it would take to the jungle.

Before that happened, certain problems presented themselves. One was that Billy's mother became scared of this immense cat, which soon weighed 300lbs. To calm her nerves, Billy built her a circular summerhouse thatched with straw, which became known as Gran's Cage, and in this the old lady sat with her knitting, while Tara prowled free outside.

In time Billy's predictions were proved triumphantly right. At the age of three Tara vanished into the forest, never returned, and during a full life bore four litters of cubs to wild males. Yet the

experiment made Billy many enemies. Hidebound conservationists accused him of polluting the local strain of Bengal tiger with a "genetic cocktail" - to which he replied that he could imagine nothing better than the infusion of vigorous new genes. He was much excited by the recent appearance of a tiger with distinctly Siberian markings, and it now seems that Tara may have carried echoes of that sub-species in her make-up.

A more sinister accusation was that she had turned man-eater. During the 1970s and 1980s an outbreak of man-eating spread through the district, Kheri. More than 100 humans were killed. Again and again people said, "It's that bloody tiger of yours. Because it was brought up with humans, it has no fear of them."

Being a volunteer wildlife warden, Billy was repeatedly called out to shoot tigers summarily convicted of murder. Always he went with a heavy heart, dreading that the culprit might be Tara. It never

was, and she lived on to the age of 14 before - so far as he knew - dying a natural death.

But the moral of the story is exactly that of the gorillas. No matter how much ingenuity, money and love a man may spend in attempts at reintroduction, the real villain is the human race and its insatiable demand for land.

In India, as in Africa, the ultimate problem for wildlife is not poaching, but shortage of space. The man-eating broke out in Kheri because humans infiltrated the reserves officially set aside for tigers. In Africa the gorillas' habitat is similarly being eaten away. So if Billy Arjan Singh should hear the deep *Aa-oum!* of a tiger boom out from behind the house on Christmas morning, it will be a present more precious than anything the Magi could have brought him.



See! the angelic host proclaim... some 72 per cent of Americans claim to have had close encounters with angels; the British are scarcely less credulous. Justine Picardie on the boom industry of the Nineties

Plus: 'Hermitage' - a new short story by Julian Barnes

And full TV and radio listings for the Christmas holiday

IN TOMORROW'S INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

A place on Millionaires' Row

Anne Spackman on the top 10 house sales of the year

For the third year running, entry to the top 10 British house sales of the year requires a minimum down-payment of £4m. More than 50 sales at over £1.5m have taken place in London alone this year, but most are eclipsed by a handful of exceptional houses and estates bought by some of the richest people in the world.

The pinnacle of the British property market bears as much resemblance to the mainstream market as Concorde does to a Trabant. It only takes a dozen bankers at Goldman Sachs to earn million pound bonuses for there to be 12 new customers bidding for the country's finest houses. Over the past three years there have been plenty of them about – and many more are in the pipeline for 1996.

If the property market is anything to go by, London is now firmly established as one of the big three financial cities of the world, along with New York and Tokyo. Agents handling houses on the Phillimore Estate in Kensington – one of the City's preferred zones – say prices have risen by 50 per cent over the last three years. Prices in the best parts of London have generally risen 20-30 per cent over the period. It is bankers and businessmen, rather than lottery winners, who are driving them up.

The top 10 sales lists are always comprised of London houses and large country estates. This year, as last, the capital dominates. This is partly because land prices are currently soaring like house prices did in the late Eighties. Farmers, particularly of the gentlemen-landowner variety, have never had it so good. They are buying land rather than selling. When the very good stuff does hit the market, the price achieved is what estate agents term "very full".

Last year saw a series of record-breaking sales of new ambassadorial residences around Regent's Park. This year it is the family houses of Chelsea, Holland Park and Kensington which have most consistently rung up the multi-million pound receipts.

Property Vision, the buying agents who acted for two of the property purchasers in this list, believe that pattern is set to continue. The company says the richest people will continue to flock to west London or the M40/M4/M3 belt west of the capital. For properties of the right calibre in the right place the competition can only get hotter. Meanwhile here is our list of the top 10 properties for sale in 1995...

1. The Old Rectory, Old Church Street, Chelsea

This spectacular speculative development was sold in February by Knight Frank & Rutley for around £22m to a Greek family for use as their principal residence. They are said to be spending the same amount again on furniture and decorations. Once an ordinary rectory, the house was extended into an ambassadorial home by the fashionable Toyoko Metropolitan Company, who completed three such ventures last year. The house has two vast entertaining rooms, 10 bedroom suites, an indoor swimming pool lined with black marble and a safe the size of the average living room. Though it is just off King's Road it has an amazing two acres of gardens, including a tennis court and summer house.

2. The Laverstoke Estate, Hampshire

This 3,000-acre slice of finest England is believed to be under offer with a price-tag of £10m. It has all the pre-requisites of a fine country estate: a beautiful parkland setting, a lake, fishing on the River Test, a pheasant and partridge shoot, not to mention the vast Georgian house itself where the library is bigger than the ballroom. The Laverstoke Estate is being sold by Savills for De La Rue, who acquired it through a business takeover. Savills refuse to comment on the deal.

3. Number 18 Holland Park, London

Holland Park has been on this list three years running and features twice in 1995. It has become the place for large, well-arranged, freehold family houses. Number 18 is a classic double-fronted white stucco villa with an addi-

tional mews house. A sale was agreed with the owner from Singapore at a staggering £8m, but a gazumpster came along, forcing the eventual price up to £8.3m. The happy agents were John D Wood.

4. The Salperton Estate in Gloucestershire

It took a long time to find a buyer for the Cotswold estate that was owned by the businessman Victor Watkins. Its main attractions are 1,700 acres with pheasant and partridge shoot and 33 cottages, as well as the 18th-century manor house. Savills eventually sold it for around £8m to another businessman, self-made millionaire Barry Houghton, who made his money in the telecommunications business.

5. Chesham Place, Belgravia, London

One family paid just over £7m for two neighbouring houses and a flat to live in while the houses were being knocked into one. They are officially mews houses, but have grand reception rooms and gardens on a par with the townhouses in the neighbourhood. They were sold by Knight Frank & Rutley.

6. Beaufort Castle, Scotland

Number one on the list of most romantic sales of the year. This ancestral seat of the Frasers of Lovat, situated on the banks of the Beaulieu Firth near Inverness, was bought in August by Ann Gloag, the bus driver's daughter who founded the Stagecoach transport empire. Brought up in a council house in Perth, she is now the owner of a 24-bedroom Highland castle and 800 acres. Ann Gloag paid about £2m for her slice of the estate and the rest of the 19,000 acres was sold for £4m in 17 separate lots by Finlayson Hughes and Knight Frank & Rutley.

7. Number 24 Rutland Gate, Kensington, London

Number 24 was the Accademia Italiana, a 40 room mansion with five inter-communicating reception rooms and 14,000 sq ft of living space. It was sold for more than £5m by Savills and Knight Frank & Rutley to a private buyer who is converting it into a family house.

8. Osborne House, Chelsea, London

This was a very English sale. Osborne House is a genuine Georgian property with lovely gardens of one third of an acre, some six bedrooms and off-street parking for five cars. It is the kind of house more commonly found in Gloucestershire than Chelsea. It was sold in the summer by Chesterfield and Knight Frank & Rutley for around £5m to an English purchaser.

9. Number 10 Holland Park, London

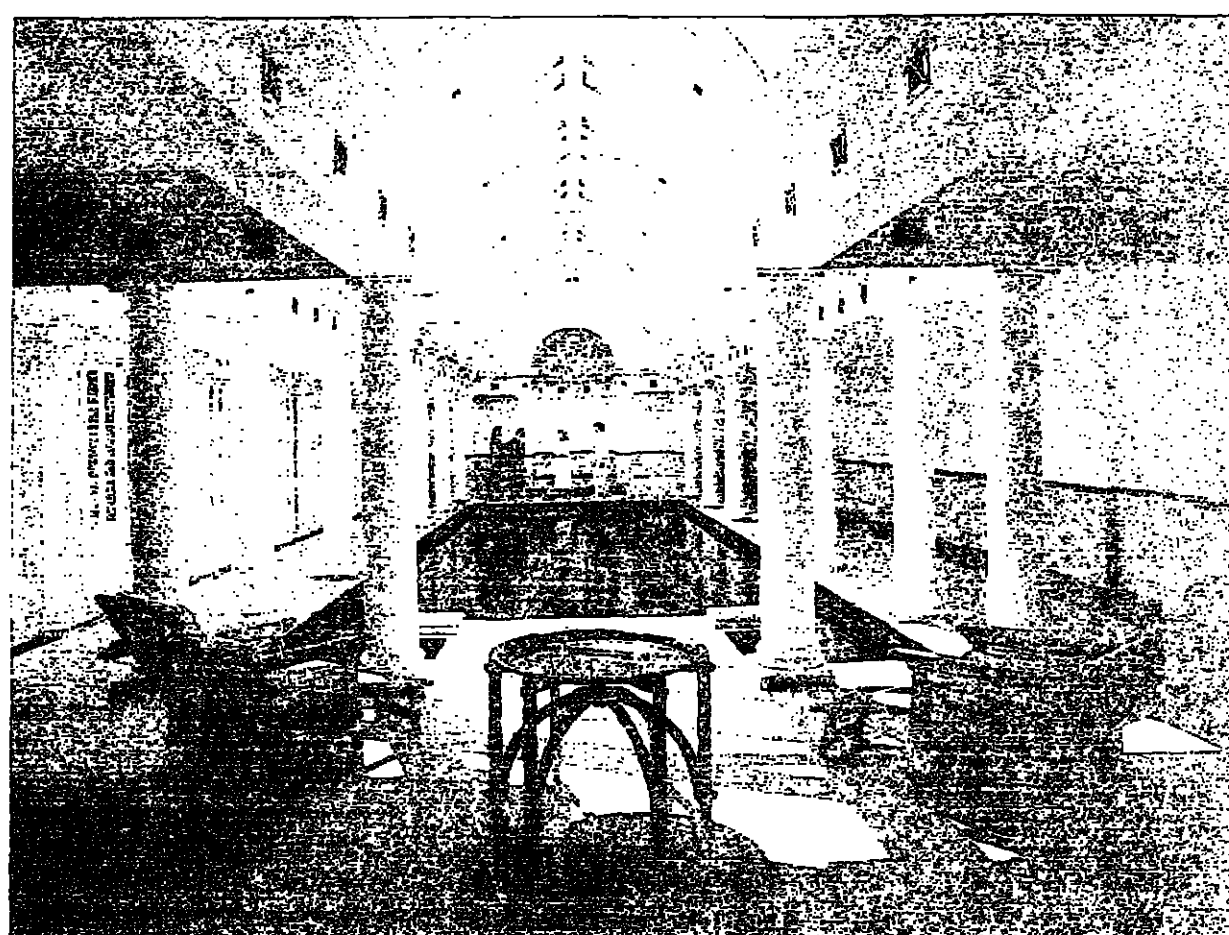
Another period, double-fronted house whose symmetry was destroyed by a garage on the lower ground floor. The new owners are expected to change that arrangement while stripping out the rest of the house – currently divided into a maisonette and two large flats. It was sold last week by John D Wood for just under £5m.

10. Number 3a Kensington Palace Green, Kensington, London

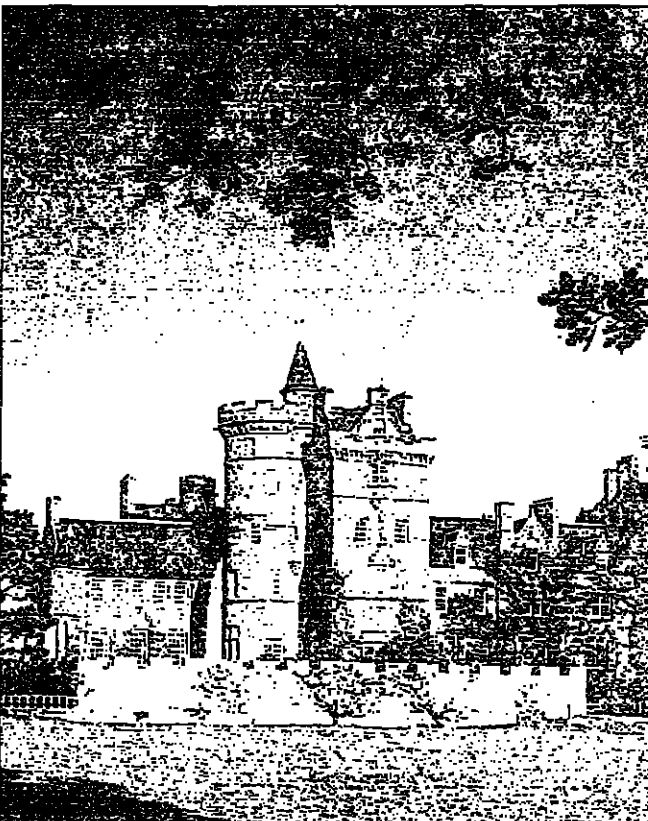
This is the penthouse flat in the Regalian block that became synonymous with the property crash. It has featured on this list three times in three years, changing hands more like a batch of shares than a home. This time the price was £4.5m through Knight Frank & Rutley.

And finally... a top garage sale:

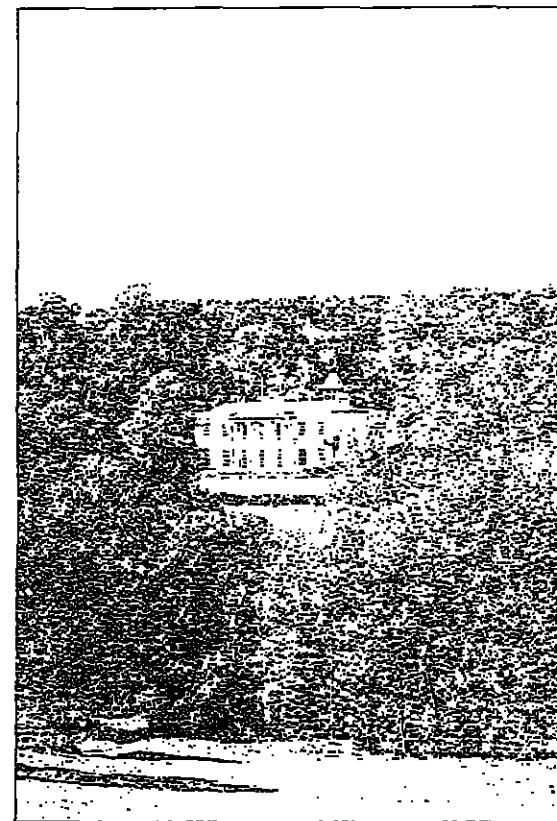
Ivana Trump's husband Riccardo Mazzucchelli paid £100,000 for a garage in Shafto Mews, Knightsbridge, London, near his home in Cadogan Square. The garage is large enough to house his gold Rolls-Royce convertible, which cost nearly twice as much. With parking spaces at such a premium it now costs the same to buy a single garage in central London as a three-bedroom semi-detached house in Baronsley.



The Old Rectory, Chelsea Photo: Herbie Knott



Left: Beaufort Castle in Scotland. In August the castle plus 800 acres sold for £2m, the rest of the 19,000 acres went for £4m. Right: the 3,000-acre Laverstoke Estate, Hampshire, that is believed to be on offer with a price of £10m. The library is said to be even bigger than the ballroom.



Holly may be the last remnant of the natural landscape

Holly has a place, even in a modern garden. By Anna Pavord

The holly and the ivy/When they are both full grown/Of all the trees that are in the wood/Dum de dum de dum, dum, dum. You've probably heard the carol a dozen times already, beamed into shopping malls, programmed into end of term nativity plays. The words are quite weird, suggesting the pagan figure of the Green Man lurking at the crib.

Holly, one of this country's rather small collection of native evergreens, carries symbolic baggage along with its berries. It stands for life in the bleak midwinter and, in country areas at least, still commands great respect. Even mechanical hedge cutters are guided carefully round a holly's dark green heacons rise up from lane hedges more often than any other tree.

How many billions of years did it take for holly to design its defence system? You can see why these evergreens need them. As winter strips the landscape bare of leaves, evergreens become magnets for browsers, even a convicted deadly poison: ivy, which sheep graze voraciously on and winter, got itself off the ground and into the air: holly has its prickles.

The clever thing about the holly's prickles is that they work in so many planes. Leaves generally are flat, two dimensional, like stencils. The holly leaf has a central midrib, like any other leaf, and eight pairs of veins branching out from the midrib at parallel lines to the eight spines on either side of the leaf. But then symmetry is abandoned and every point meets its own line. Some curl back under the leaf, some turn up to the sky, some fill the slanting voids in

between. It means that whichever angle you approach it from, the leaf will jab you. It's strange how each point knows what its neighbour is up to and makes sure to do something different.

Think of the leaf as a rugby forward line, said a botanist friend. If a winger, or next door point, darts off in a certain direction, the rest don't follow, but do what will be best for the team as a whole, covering the gaps.

And yes, I know that a football analogy would be much more fashionable, but being Welsh, I was 22 before I ever saw a football game. It was at Liverpool and they were playing Everton, but the match seemed to have little of the drama of the Newport/Cardiff rugby jousts on which I had been brought up.

Hollies are underrated now because they are slow. We live in an impatient age. People move around more than they used to and don't particularly want to plant things that they won't get the benefit of. This is a danger in gardens. It leads to layouts that, like instant take-away food, are ultimately unsatisfying. The ingredients are limited and, after the initial gratification, there is no lingering sense of longer pleasures. A holly can give you that – in spades.

In your garden, you can make a stand against the prevailing mood of the age. The great 18th-century landscape gardens were made at a time when their busy agricultural owners were fencing and hedging and parcelling out enclosing land. Capability Brown's landscapes reminded us of a pastoral past, before turnips, before corn.

If the mood now is instant, disposable, then our gardens should become places where the opposite things are going on. We should be planting slow, steady, sustaining things. In the garden at least, if in no other part of our lives, we can plan a future.

A satisfying garden is a resonant one. That is easier to recognise than to pin down. A resonant garden has things going on in it that are not of the here and now. Built into it are messages from previous owners of the garden and previous uses of the land.

Even after the mammoth building boom of the Eighties, most people live in places that others have lived in before. Even if the house itself is new, the space around it may carry hints of what happened there previously. Huge pear trees in suburban gardens round the outskirts of London remind us of the orchards that used to feed the tenement dwellers of the city. Big old hay trees planted close to houses recall the time when gardeners believed quite literally that "neither witch nor devil, thunder nor lightning will hurt a man in the place where a hay tree is" as the 17th-century herbalist Nicholas Culpeper put it.

The gardener must balance between imposing his own will on a patch and recognising the worth of some things that were going on there before he arrived.

Gardens are like houses. The most interesting rooms are those that are built up from layers of possessions, not of the same age or style, but which all reflect a particular personality. In the same way, you may not have cho-

sen the pear tree at the bottom of the garden, but it is probably not doing a bad job. You can absorb it by slinging a hammock from its branches or growing a clematis up its trunk.

A holly at the bottom of the garden may be the last remnant of the natural landscape that existed before urbanisation spread over your patch. That is quite a comforting thought – a thread that connects the before with the after. It need not stop you planting cyclamen close to its trunk and ferns to unfold after the holly's berries have gone.

Some ecological gaudieries insist that only by planting wildernesses can gardeners attain to the ranks of the ecologically blessed. That is bunkum. The ecological soundness of gardeners has to do with their methods, not their choice of plants. A so-called "wild" garden is not intrinsically better for the environment than a tended one, though different creatures will thrive in each. The holly though will stand for a little bit of unclaimed territory at the edge of your kingdom and will add immeasurably to the spirit of the place.

Look for *Ilex x altissima* 'Silver Sentinel' with grey green leaves edged in cream (female), broad-leaved 'Camellifolia' (female), gold-variegated 'Golden King' (female), 'Hodginsii' with its irregularly produced spines (male), 'Lawsoniana', whose dark green leaves have bright yellow centres (female), compact, dome-shaped 'Wilsonii' (female) and *I. aquifolium* 'J.C. van Tol' with large crops of berries (female). Only female trees bear berries but there must be a male tree in the vicinity to pollinate them.

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Another time, another place

Seasonal stories by five celebrated travellers

PATRICK LEIGH FERMOR, 1933, Germany

In the year Hitler came to power, Patrick Leigh Fermor walked through Germany on his way to Constantinople. He spent Christmas at Bingen in the Rhineland.

The only customer, I unsling my rucksack in a little Gasthof. Standing on chairs, the innkeeper's pretty daughters, who were aged from five to 15, were helping their father decorate a Christmas tree: hanging witch balls, looping tinsel, fixing candles to the branches, and crowning the tip with a wonderful star. They asked me to help and when it was almost done, their father, a tall, thoughtful looking man, uncorked a slim bottle from the Rudesheim vineyard just over the river. We drank it together and had nearly finished a second by the time the last touches to the tree were complete. Then the family assembled round it and sang. The candles were the only light and the solemn and charm-



ing ceremony was made memorable by the candlelit faces of the girls and by their beautiful and clear voices. I was rather surprised that they didn't sing "Stille Nacht": it had been much in the air the last few days, but it is a Lutheran hymn and I think this bank of the Rhine was mostly Catholic. Two of the carols they sang have stuck in my memory: "O Du Heilige" and "Es ist ein

Ros entsprungen": both were entrancing, and especially the second, which, they told me, was very old. In the end I went to church with them and stayed the night. When all the inhabitants of Bingen were exchanging greetings with each other outside the church in the small hours, a few flakes began falling. Next morning the household embraced each other, shook hands again and wished everyone a happy Christmas. The smallest of the daughters gave me a tangerine and a packet of cigarettes wrapped beautifully in tinsel and silver paper. I wished I'd had something to hand her, neatly done up in a holypatterned ribbon - I thought later of my aluminium pencil case containing a new Venus or Royal Sovereign wound in tissue paper, but too late.

From 'A Time of Gifts' by Patrick Leigh Fermor, © John Murray

Laurie Lee, 1953, Spain

Laurie Lee lived in Spain during the Civil War. He returned 13 years later and spent the winter travelling through Andalusia, with Christmas in Granada.

Christmas morning: the streets empty, chastened and full of crumpled cymbals. So we went up into the Palace of the Alhambra, into the fresh gold air under the crimson roofs, to walk among the courts and fountains, to stroke the plump lemons and watch the fish. This was the first time we had been into the Palace, and one's immediate impression was surprise at its smallness. Here was none of the official bombast of Versailles and Blenheim, designed to impress by sheer weight of masonry. Instead a series of perfect little rooms, like tiny pavilions, draped themselves on slender pillars round courts of orange trees and water. Everything was open to the air, with fretted windows and pierced, arched walls framing green gardens and the distant hills. All was tender, feminine and intimately sensual. For the men who built the Alhambra were supreme miniaturists, scaling their work to set off a handsome, small boned people, and preferring the epigram and the lyric poem to all forms of rhetoric and inflation.

It was a new dimension in architecture - or rather an old forgotten one. It grew like a flower up its many levelled hill. The delicate pillars, reflected in the pools, shivered like the stalks of lilies: the cloistered fountains trickled on leaves and fountains, and the small gold rooms gathered across their walls a quivering light of snow and water, asking only for a group of cloaked ambassadors or trousered girls to furnish them completely. This was the home of pastoral kings, of poet shepherds raised to glory, and looking upon its ornate surfaces one found no fault in it - only a profusion of exotic fancy



controlled by absolute self confidence and taste.

In the Palace gardens we ate a Christmas lunch of bread and raisins, and then, in the afternoon, followed a great crowd under a threatening sky to see another bull fight. This was a special show designed to celebrate the first day of the Pascua. Six young Granadinos, nominated by their various supporters, had been voted into the ring to fight six young bulls as green in years and mixed in courage as they were.

We climbed to the wide concrete seats high above the arena and shared a cask of wine with a family from Alpujarra. The bull ring was crowded to the sky, the black clouds rolled down from the mountains, the air darkened, and the young toreros, in their tight suits, looked waxen and frightened.

The spectacle that now began was in many ways a repetition of the one we had seen in Seville. There was the same drawn intensity on the faces of the boys, the same brush courage alternating with bouts of hysterical panic, the same uneven, confused and often vicious bulls. It was their very youth that made them so dangerous. They came trotting in, their tasselled tails held high, cast puzzled eyes around the crowd, caught sight of some wavering challenge in the ring and charged

or retreated according to their mettle. Then, with as much grace and style as the boy could muster, he would step forward and run the bull close to his body. Often, at this early stage, the bull's innocence made him charge the cape every time, and if the boy was lucky the passes were straight and clean, the bull's rushes shorter and tighter. This, like a successful dribble at football, was what the crowd had come to see, and its effect on them was like a shared orgasm, so that they shouted together "Olé!" in one great voice, a loud excited noise to be heard all over the city.

It was in the later stages of the combat that the boys showed their inexperience, when the bull grew more difficult to handle, when the barbs of the bandilleros had torn his shoulders and he had grown angry and dismayed. Then he would stand alone in the middle of the ring, bellowing and dripping blood, or would wander miserably into a corner trying to escape. Only the best of bull fighters could make anything of that situation, could lead the bull back into the fight and finish him cleanly. A less assured torero - like most of those we saw that afternoon - would run after the retreating bull with a kind of bitter sickness on his face, hating the whole thing; would wave his arms, and shout and caper, and sooner or later, in his frantic misery, get well tossed for his pains.

Everybody got tossed that afternoon, and some several times. There was one poor fellow named Angelito, a blond boy with large ears, who soon lost all control of his bull and was thrown round the ring like a shuttlecock. The crowd was much amused by this, especially our neighbour from Alpujarra, who rolled in the aisles with delight.

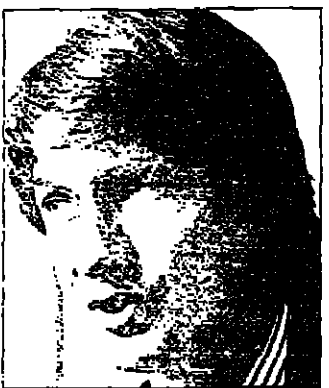
From 'A Rose for Winter' by Laurie Lee, © Hogarth Press

P J O'ROURKE, 1985, El Salvador

As a foreign correspondent P J O'Rourke found himself in El Salvador over Christmas. He had arrived full of preconceptions.

On Christmas Eve, real havoc broke loose. From the balcony of my room at the Sheraton, I could see the entire city. There were powder flashes and staccato bursts in every neighbourhood. Rockets whistled. Huge explosions illuminated the surrounding hills. A dozen blasts came inside the hotel compound itself. Bits of debris flew past my head. The brazen face of war? No, firecrackers.

Everybody in Latin America likes to set off firecrackers on Christmas Eve, but nobody likes it more than the Salvadorans. They have everything - cherry



bombs, M80s, defingering little strings of one-inchers and items of ordnance that can turn a 55-gallon oil drum into a steel hula skirt. The largest have a warning printed on them, that they shouldn't be lit by drunks. I am no

stranger to loud noise. I've been to a Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels concert. I once dated a woman with two kids. But at midnight on Christmas Eve - with the windows shut, the air conditioner on, the TV turned up and the bathroom door closed - I couldn't hear myself sing "Wild Colonial Boy" in the shower. On Christmas Day I saw people raking their yards, gathering mounds of spent grey firecrackers as large as autumn leaf piles.

You'd think after six years of civil war and 464 years of civil unrest, more explosions would be the last thing the Salvadorans would want. Or, maybe, the thing they want most.

From 'Holidays in Hell' by P J O'Rourke © Picador (£5.99)



The snow-covered Rhineland, where Patrick Leigh Fermor spent Christmas in 1933

Photograph: Allan Cash

ERIC NEWBY, 1963, India

With his wife Wanda, Eric Newby followed the Ganges from Haridwar to the Bay of Bengal. Christmas was at Kanpur in Orissa.

In contrast to the chilliness displayed by our compatriots was Christmas dinner with Mr William, his wife Mary and the rest of the Noronha family. It was preceded by quantities of drink to which we had grown unaccustomed. Afterwards we lay about listlessly among stuffed tigers and other trophies of the chase shot by Mr William who, in spite of advancing years and increasing deafness, was a noted and passionate hunter, ourselves feeling rather like things that had just been returned from the taxidermist.

Later we attempted to telephone our children in England. As a conversation it was not a success. Neither of the parties could hear a word that the other was saying, but the operator at Kanpur who had been roused by our bellowings came to our aid and passed on small snippets of information.

"Now they are saying that it is snowing... Now that they are receiving many letters but they are not reading them because they are not able to do so. Please write more distinctly..." and so on.

In the evening we went to the cinema. The film was a gruesome musical comedy set amongst almond blossom in Kashmir. Soon we were fast asleep. It had been a long day.

It had begun at midnight on Christmas



Eve with Mass at the Roman Catholic Church in the Cantonment. When we arrived the service had already been in full blast for half an hour and when we left at one in the morning the congregation, which by this time was asleep on its feet, was still being harangued by the Indian priest who showed no signs of coming to an end of his peroration. Even Wanda was impressed. "They would not stand for that in my country," she said. "Many would not stand at all."

"Why?" I said. I was not really interested. By this time I was a bit fed up with her church. Everything in it seemed to go on for such a long time, and here both the preliminary addresses and the sermon had been given in Hindi and English.

"They would not be able to. They would be drunk."

At 11 o'clock on Christmas Day we went to "my" church. I had insisted on Wanda coming too, principally to have my own back on her for what she had inflicted on me.

The Memorial Church at Kanpur was nothing like the Memorial Church at Fatehgarh. There was nothing dilapidated about it. Everything had the appearance of being constantly polished and burnished, from the varnished pews to the brass plaque in memory of General Sir Mowbray Thompson, KCIE, late of the 53rd Native Infantry, the last survivor of the Massacre, who died in 1917.

The congregation consisted of some 20 of the British Colony and a number of Anglo Indians who made brave efforts to look their best, but although we sang lustily and smiled benignly when we thought anyone was looking in our direction, it was no passport to the British colony and although, as the bank official had told Wanda previously when he cashed her cheque, everyone knew who we were and where we had come from, we walked out of the church without anyone saying a word to us.

"If they behaved like this with the Indians, then they deserved to be massacred," Wanda said.

From 'Slowly down the Ganges' by Eric Newby © HarperCollins

SHEILA PAINE, 1990, Pakistan

Sheila Paine travelled through the Hindu Kush in search of an embroidered amulet. Initially denied access to the closed-off Makran territory, she joined an Italian Archeological Mission that had been granted permission to study there over the winter.

No chance of any wine, I suppose. "Wine? No. No wine. Whisky. Black Dog." "Not for Christmas. What about cognac?" "What's that?" "Brandy."

"Write it down."

I wrote "Cognac Grande Fine Napoléon" and drew a few stars.

JM returned, flushed with success, a newspaper packet under his arm. "Cognac Napoléon. Made in France," the label said and the screw top didn't appear to have been tampered with, though the cognac didn't taste quite right. We had it with almonds the boys had cracked with stones on the verandah of Circuit House.

Rashly I had offered to produce a Christmas dinner and ferreted around the bazaar to see what there was to buy. It wasn't promising. Some fruit and a few vegetables and nuts were available but the



oil, black cherry jam, Elli coffee and some spaghetti they wouldn't part with. Khaliq had procured a packet of Kraft processed cheese. "And" said Sheila "you have to be very careful. Even with the rubbish they have to put up with here these Italians can be very fussy when it comes to something European. They won't eat things like ready-grated Parmesan. You should have heard Ugo. Parmeggiano? Gia preparato? Impossibile. Non mangio."

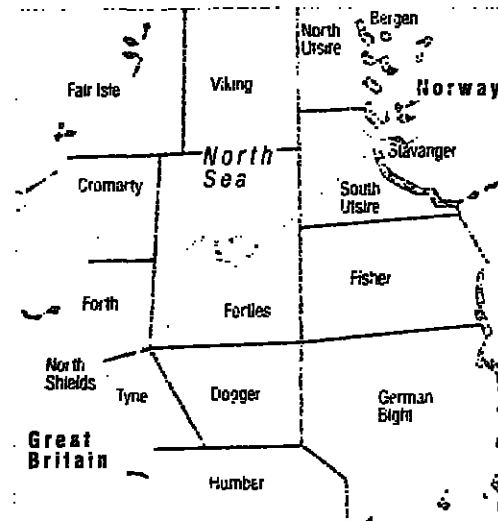
We hung tinsel stars bought at the marriage shop on a branch of tamarisk, so that we had a Christmas tree, and made little trees to eat, cut out of green halwa. In honour of the Italians we ate on Christmas Eve.

The boys had kept their spaghetti to serve us for Christmas Day lunch. Enough for five, they said, but there were to be 10 of us. Genoveffa had invited some Gichkis and hadn't told Gianni, who was having a fit in the kitchen when Captain Khalid arrived with three bottles of Smugglers. "This is our national dish," said Genoveffa proudly, indicating the spaghetti. She had not only omitted to tell anybody about the extra guests she had invited but had also done nothing about the meal.

From 'The Afghan Amulet' by Sheila Paine © Penguin (£6.99)

Why just listen to the shipping forecast?

When, like Simon Calder, you can have the 'north-east six, rain later' experience first-hand



Color Viking at rest in Bergen. Inset: a fellow passenger scans the horizon for signs of a pint for less than £5

Photographs: Simon Calder

To find out how much of an understatement "Force Five: fresh breeze" really is, take a cut-price boat trip around the Radio 4 Shipping Forecast, and feel that 24mph northerly "fresh breeze" rippling through your windcheater. A midwinter cruise from North Shields to North Utsire and back costs as little as £50, and takes you through Tyne, Forties and South Utsire, narrowly missing Dogger and clipping Forth.

Even for listeners in the bath rather than Biscay, the Shipping Forecast is a wonderful piece of poetry. Four times each day, the solemn tones of the Radio 4 continuity announcer radiate from the Long Wave transmitter at Droitwich, Worcestershire (you can see this relic of Empire, and hear its interference with your radio, when you drive past on the M5). "North-east six, rain later, good becoming moderate" - the wind direction and speed, general weather and visibility are scribbled down by crew aboard fishing boats and supertankers, yachts and oil rigs. All the waters around the British Isles have been carved up into irregular polygons and allotted exotic names, with North and South Utsire the latest additions to the litany. These are sea areas on the coast of Norway. The precise meaning of Utsire (pronounced ut-seer-a by Radio Four) is shrouded in an impenetrable North Sea fog.

Color Viking, which gamely cuts a cross-section through the shipping chart between the UK and Bergen, is a Channel ferry with attitude. She sails one of the oldest maritime links between Britain and Scandinavia, but her primary purpose at this time of year is to take Norwegians on Christmas shopping trips to Newcastle. Thus they avoid Norway's high taxes on everything from tobacco to trolleys - both of which are prominently on sale in the huge on-board supermarket.

Your role is to make up the numbers, to be part of the passenger ballast filling the cabins and the bar-stools not already occupied by Norwegians. In return you get a berth for three nights (the middle one spent in port in Bergen) and four days at sea. Not that you can tell where you are once the door slams shut on your cabin. Cut-price cruisers are billeted in the bowels of the ship: below the truck deck and well beneath the water level. Your lowly posi-

How to join the cruise

Simon Calder paid £34 for a four-day voyage - from Newcastle, visiting both Stavanger and Bergen, through Color Line (0191-296 1313). The price includes sharing a two-berth cabin and buffet breakfast each morning. A lower fare of £50 applies if you share a four-berth cabin, but availability is limited. From 6 January until 26 March, children travel free when sharing a cabin with a minimum of one adult.

tion does not mean comfort is absent, though: every cabin has a built-in bathroom.

The company also throws in a buffet breakfast each morning. To judge by the bulging pockets and sleeves of some passengers, the extravagant spread of cheese, herring, eggs and meat provides snacks for the whole day. Full meals are expensive: an all-you-can-eat dinner weighs in at £26, but includes plenty of fruit to help ward off scurvy.

Since the Norwegians are numerically and financially ascendant on the voyage, most on-board entertainment is aimed at them. The Tyne Pub is one corner of the vessel where the British hold sway. Lubricated by duty-free Newcastle Brown Ale, they indeed sway back and forth to the music of Phil Dorne, pianist. Like the Radio 4 forecast of air pressure in Shannon, most of the ensemble are "falling, slowly".

Not to your taste, perhaps, but more promising than the Club Viking. This Nordically sparse nightclub reeks of early Seventies decor and early Abba hits. The barman does good business in Jule öl (Christmas beer) and light trade in a cocktail called Stormy Weather - vodka, apricot liqueur and Cointreau. While the waves crash around outside, the house band earns just a ripple of applause. Take your portable radio out on deck, and the Radio 4 announcer reveals the latest from the Channel Light Vessel Automatic.

Even among the non-imbibers, a kind of virtual drunkenness soon sets in aboard Color Viking. You lurch unsteadily around the decks as sea area Forties roars. If the swell proves too strong for sleep, however, you can always go sightseeing. Under

Who to ask

Norwegian Tourist Board, Charles House, 5-11 Lower Regent Street, London SW1Y 4LR (0171-839 6255).

The Shipping Forecast: when to hear it

On Radio Four LW (198kHz) at 12.45am, 5.55am, 12.55pm and 5.50pm. A booklet on the forecast is available free by writing to the Enquiries Officer, The Met. Office, London Road, Bracknell, Berks RG12 2SZ.

gloomy December skies, the daylight view from the deck is a monochromatic spectrum of greys. At night, this contracts to a narrow band of black. Yet as you roar into sea area Forties, the horizon becomes speckled with clusters of what look like Christmas-tree lights, each topped by a flame. You are sailing through the oil and gas fields that conferred wealth upon Norway and saved Britain from bankruptcy.

Dawn brings a fresh coat of grey to the sky, while Sue McGregor warns about an overturned lorry on the M1. Out on the North Sea, 8am GMT is the best time to ask to see the bridge. While Color Viking sails through open water, passengers are allowed to visit the vessel's control centre: this courtesy is not extended once she starts negotiating the tricky Norwegian coastline.

Climbing to the summit of the ship, you feel as if you have just walked into a hi-tech office. There is no sign of a big wooden wheel with a helmsman roped to it: everything is computer-controlled. Your mind is put at rest about the slight listing you felt during the night, when the First Officer shows the heeling controls that shift ballast between tanks. A deliberate list is introduced while the decks are being cleaned, so the water can run off into the sea. A Global Positioning Unit predicts Color Viking's precise arrival time, while the radar system computes the course and speed of any vessel in the surrounding area.

All the electronics in the world cannot insure against accidents, though. Dents in the port side of the vessel were incurred a fortnight ago, in collision with a cargo ship in Stavanger harbour.

Nineteen hours out of North Shields, South Utsire finally subsides. Color Viking

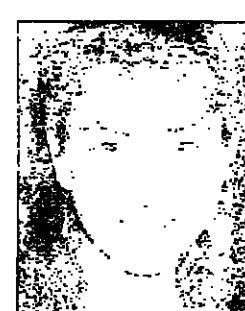
enters Norwegian coastal waters and the port of Stavanger, this time without incident. The place where she pauses to drop off a few passengers is right alongside a cluster of cottages so postcard-pretty they look as if the Norwegian Tourist Board must have paid for them to be built. Your first impression of Norway is of neat, bright triangles of clapperboard, supporting roofs of terracotta and gold and weatherbeaten green. The only impediment to this crisp tableau is the yellow road sign saying "England", reminding residents they can escape to the Tyne any time they wish.

Bergen is another seven hours north, so the on-board distractions sail on. The Club Viking acquires a new lease of life when bilingual bingo begins. Judging by the enthusiasm with which the British contingent played, some of them must have memorised every Norwegian number from en (one) to niiti (90). The bingo caller is a ship's officer named Bjorn. Two giggling mini-cruisers decide Bjorn's catchphrase is "Sex-sex", which is the way 66 sounds when Bjorn calls it out in Norwegian.

As with all the best cruises, passengers are given a pre-arrival briefing. Bjorn the bingo caller pops up again to prepare us for Norway, suggesting a late-night ascent in the funicular railway to the top of a nearby mountain, and running through the options for the following day. Color Viking's schedule is neatly devised to make the 20 hours spent moored in Bergen harbour seem like a two-day break. Passengers can come and go as they please, treating their floating hotel as if it were, well, a floating hotel. Shoppers are briefed about the alarming lack of bargains ashore, and told how to claim back Norwegian VAT - for any purchase of over £30 you bring the receipts back on board, and the purser hands out cash for the amount of the tax. Back in the bar, the faces on a huddle of Norwegians reveal the grim desperation of drinkers who realise they will shortly be back in the land of the £5 pint.

One day and one hour after leaving North Shields, the Color Viking slides into her berth at Bergen. Against a background buzz of static, 700 miles from Droitwich, Radio 4 still cuts comfortably through. After the longest of nights on the waves, you know now why the shipping forecast is on Long Wave.

CRUISERS' STORIES



Cleo
from Canada

The voyage to Norway offered the chance to combine cruising and skiing. Did Cleo find snow? "No - unusually for mid-December, the resort of Voss was closed. So rather than throwing myself into the harbour, I went shopping in Bergen and found a slightly used skiing sweater at the Salvation army shop for only £50 kroner (about £5). I also found a Norwegian skier!"



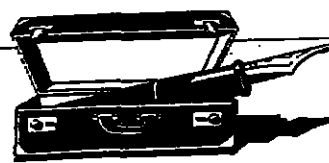
Morten
from Redditch

Morten lives in Redditch, but is in love with Nordic life. Did the voyage satisfy his Scandinavian affinity? "I did bond with an eight-foot troll, so to speak (an oversized version of this legendary Norwegian creature embraces visitors to Bergen). But there just wasn't time to do the place justice, and the trip made me determined to work my way around Scandinavia at some time in the future."



Emma
from Stoke

Emma went sailing in search of a real-life Viking. Did she find her Scandinavian soul-mate? "No, but I spotted quite a lot of likely prospects. I loved climbing down the mountain at midnight through the pine trees with streams rushing past, although at one point, I tripped and cut my knee and saw my blood rushing past, too."



something to declare

Bargain of the week

Not every seat on every flight is full. Until the end of the year, Maersk Air (0171-333 0066) offers a spouse fare which makes business class even cheaper than economy on flights to Scandinavia. Tickets from Gatwick to Kristiansand in Norway, with an optional day out in Copenhagen, cost £250 each for a husband and wife in business class. People of opposite gender not technically married have in the past succeeded in obtaining this fare.

Trouble spots

This week's advice on places to avoid, from our man at Broadcasting House

The BBC has issued new instructions to its journalists on high-risk parts of the world. "Category One" countries are deemed exceptionally high risk areas, where battle-field conditions prevail. Burundi and Somalia have this month been re-classified as Category One, joining Afghanistan, Algeria, Bosnia and Chechnya.

The risks of travel in Iraq and Sierra Leone have been downgraded to Category Two: "areas of abnormally high risk, often with extensive civil disorder or guerrilla warfare". Other countries in this classification include Colombia, Croatia (outside Dubrovnik, Split and Zagreb), southern Mexico and south-east Turkey.

Further information on these regions should be obtained from the Foreign Office (not the BBC) by calling 0171-270 4129; on BBC 2 Ceefax page 564 onwards; on the Internet at <http://www.fco.gov.uk/>

Visitors' book

A Soldier's Life, part of the Discovery, Newcastle

Enjoyed our visit after we eventually found the Discovery; we didn't realise it was in the Science & Engineering Museum - Mary and Mike Angulo, Somerset.

An enjoyable and nostalgic exhibition. Brings back childhood wartime memories - Joseph Rees, Cramlington.

Very interesting; puts several regimental museums to shame - D G Bell, Newcastle.

Very good for nothing [the exhibition, like the whole of the Discovery, is free] - Catherine Palmer, no address.

Soldier Soldier inspired me to see this. Ace! - K Gunn, Washington.

A Special Announcement

The Costa Rica Wanderer

Due to variable flight loadings during the first half of 1996 we are able to present a number of departures at a fraction of the normal tariff for those that have the flexibility of travelling at short notice and enjoy a degree of independence. However, we should warn would-be travellers that these offers are very popular and those that were offered during November and December sold within days of being announced, so early telephone reservations are essential.

THE COSTA RICA WANDERER

Costa Rica is being so compact and varied is the ideal location in which to tour and relax. The Wanderer programme concept is simple: it includes international flights ex. Gatwick to and from San Jose, one night's pre-booked accommodation to be followed by a series of 6 accommodation vouchers that can be redeemed at a variety of hotels and lodges throughout the country. Car hire can be obtained for approximately \$1500 per week thus making it an ideal arrangement for those that wish to take advantage of our organisation yet free to roam.



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money

For every genuine 'wonder stock' that crops up there are always plenty of opportunities to jump on the bandwagon after it has started rolling. You don't need to be there at the beginning to make a packet of money

This is the time of year when the statisticians come out of the woodwork and give us their annual "what might have been" lecture. We will hear a lot in the next ten days about where we should have put our money this year if we had wanted to maximise our returns.

Newspapers and stockbrokers produce lists that summarise which shares did best, and how the various asset classes (equities, bonds, property and so on) have fared over the last 12 months.

It is best to approach this annual, unforgiving exercise in a spirit of due humility. Hindsight is a wonderful thing, but as one well-known investor of my acquaintance puts it: "Anyone who drives a car with their eyes firmly fixed on the rear-view mirror is likely to end up hitting a wall."

There is only so much of value you can learn from how things turned out in practice; and even less from aspiring to find the best of all conceivable investments in a year when

above-average performance would have served you more than adequately. As long as you avoided property and gold, and steered clear of construction shares and emerging markets, you will have probably done fairly well in 1995, whatever you did.

I dare say that you, like me, were one of the millions who missed out on British Biotech - this year's best-performing share (up just over 200 per cent) - which may turn out to be what a number of excitable brokers are already calling the next Glaxo. Well, the only correct response to that is "too bad." There are worse disappointments in life than missing out on the early rise of a good share, even one which had discovered a potentially world-beating drug.

If you are one of those whom this does worry, experience suggests that the way to console yourself is to remember two things.

One is that every gain in the stock market has to be measured against the risk involved. Few of us have the



JONATHAN DAVIS
INVESTMENTS

time or the knowledge required to find out what British Biotech does, let alone to appreciate the commercial significance of any new compound it may have discovered. Investing in the company at this stage, before commercial and regulatory trials have established what its drugs can safely do, is a high-risk strategy. Those who are prepared to take on that risk have earned their 200 per cent gain. It does not mean that you should necessarily join them.

The second consoling thought is that for every gen-

uine "wonder stock" that crops up, there are always plenty of opportunities to jump on the bandwagon after it has started rolling. You don't need to be there at the beginning to make a packet of money out of it.

With the benefit of hindsight, you would need to have started buying Glaxo shares in the 1970s in order to maximise your return, but anyone who latched onto it in the 1980s - long after its ulcer drug Zantac was known about and indeed had started to be sold commercially - could still have done handsomely out of it. The shares have risen by the best part of 50 per cent this year alone, thanks to the success of the Wellcome takeover, which looks like turning out to be one of the corporate steals, not just of this past year, but of the decade as well.

Scanning through the lists of the most successful investments in 1995, two other things strike me. One is how confounded the so-called experts have again been this year. The consensus of opin-

ion among professional forecasters this time last year was, by and large, that this was going to be a fair but tough year for financial markets, with strong economic growth likely to require higher interest rates, particularly in the United States. I personally remember listening to one highly regarded US economist - a man with formidable connections in New York and Washington - confidently predicting in February that the Federal Reserve would have to raise US interest rates at least twice before the autumn to choke off demand.

In fact, not for the first time, the reverse of what the pundits expected has happened. Both the Fed in the States, and to a lesser extent European central banks, have all found themselves struggling to cope with a rather different phenomenon, namely a worrying slowdown in their economies which has left them cutting rather than raising interest rates. If there is one fundamental story in investment this year it has to be the general decline in

interest rates over the past year. The Fed, the German Bundesbank and the British authorities have all cut their rates in the last two weeks. While modest in themselves, when combined with earlier cuts in the cost of money, the cumulative effect has been highly significant.

What is more, in addition to the short-term rate changes made by governments and central banks, there is also an even more profound force at work - which I believe is also the second main lesson to be drawn from the year's events in the markets.

The interest rates that the authorities can control directly are short term ones. But what really matters to investment markets are long-term interest rates. They ultimately determine how shares and other classes of financial asset are valued. They reflect what investors expect to happen over time to inflation and economic performance.

Governments cannot influence them directly. This year the yield on the US long bond - a 30-year government bond

- has fallen sharply from 8 per cent at the start of the year to just over 6 per cent now. It means that the long bond yield, which peaked at over 12 per cent in the early 1980s, continues its long-run secular down trend. Last year's crisis in the bond market now looks like an aberration, and there is no sign that long-term interest rates have yet reached the bottom.

In real terms - after adjusting for inflation - long-term interest rates remain above the 2 per cent to 3 per cent level that was the norm in the 1950s and 1960s, so there may yet be room for further falls now that the inflationary horrors of the 1970s are finally being purged from investors' memories.

It is this decline in long-term interest rates that has helped to give us the extended bull market in shares that we have experienced since the early 1980s, and the message from the past 12 months is that this unprecedented period of positive stock market returns has not yet come to an end.

The worst the news the better for anyone looking to make good money out of recovery

By Alison Eadie

The M&G Recovery Fund, launched in 1969 to buy the shares everyone else was selling, is now the UK's third largest unit trust with 150,000 unitholders and £1.4 billion under management.

Its size limits manoeuvrability and presents a challenge, but not an impossible one, says its manager Richard Hughes. Big stakes and dramatic recoveries are needed to maintain outper-

formance, but so far the market keeps throwing up opportunities.

The fund's shares are currently languishing a little at 25p after touching 35.5p earlier this year. But average annual compound growth rate since launch is 20 per cent and capital growth is the objective.

The philosophy of the fund has been refined over the years, says Mr Hughes,

but the starting point is still to look for companies in trouble. The bigger the bad news appears - preferably on the front page of the *Financial Times* - the better.

"Investors see bad news, panic and sell, I then look and start to do my work," says Mr Hughes.

First he has to decide if there is a solution, or if the company is in an irretrievable mess. If there is hope,

there must also be the prospect of the shares moving up strongly as problems are solved.

The three elements of recovery are usually a change of management, an injection of capital and the passage of time, explains Mr Hughes.

The passage of time, combined with a change of management, came spectacularly right in the case of Guinness. When Ernest Saunders left in disgrace and Sir Anthony Tennant went in to head a new team, the company was being threatened by a £1 billion lawsuit from Argill.

A few years down the road, profits have rolled in, the shares have appreciated several-fold and the scandals of the past have faded into the background. From a low point of around 120p late in 1987 Guinness shares appreciated fivefold to touch 600p in 1992, although their subsequent performance has been more subdued and the shares this week are trading just below 460p.

The Recovery Fund by its nature courts the danger of holdings going bust. Some 23 have done just that in the life of the fund, a tally of almost one a year.

The biggest failures for Mr Hughes, who has managed the fund for eight years, were Lowndes Queensway and Davies &

Newman - each of which represented 1 per cent of total assets. However, he has avoided some of the biggest nasties of recent years including Polly Peck, British & Commonwealth and Coleroll.

The flipside to the danger of one of the investments going bust is the enhanced likelihood of a share being taken over, usually at a significant premium to the current market price at the time of the bid.

The fund's largest holding is presently TSB, whose shares have soared since the announcement of the merger with Lloyds Bank. From a low of 217p they soared to a peak of 417p and are still within touching distance of £4.

Other winners this year have included Fisons, taken over by Rhone Poulenc Rorer, and Kleinwort Benson, which was acquired by Dresdner Bank.

Despite the boost provided by takeovers, M&G has a house policy of not supporting hostile bids. They are expensive and often work out badly for both sides, says Mr Hughes.

"We accept agreed bids and bids which have gone unconditional, but we believe there are sound commercial reasons for not accepting hostile bids," he adds. He points to the examples of Molins and Birmid

Qualcast. Bolstered by a 17 per cent stake held by M&G Recovery Fund, Molins fought off five takeover attempts in four years, the last at 275p a share in 1990. Retaining its independence, the company has gone on to greater glory and its shares reached a high of 825p this year.

Birmid Qualcast, supported by M&G, saw off the first Blue Circle bid in 1988 at 380p a share, but then accepted the second a few months later at 450p.

As well as a time to buy, there is a time to sell. The fund holds investments for an average of five to six years, excluding takeover stocks which tend to exit faster.

Sometimes the fund loses faith. Mr Hughes saw the writing on the wall for Ferranti and managed to sell many shares before the company collapsed.

Sometimes the time to sell is when the investment has made up its underperformance and matched its peers. When a company's return on sales and capital are up to the industry average or its price to earnings ratio matches the stockmarket norm, there is a case for saying it has recovered.

The third option is to wait for outperformance. Mr Hughes points out that there is a virtuous circle associated with recovery stocks. As companies emerge from the

mire, investment rises, profits go up, morale improves and good people are attracted. Former "dogs" often go on to be stars.

It is important for the fund to capture at least some of that uplift, as the multiplier effect on a big stake is dramatic. The fund sold its 13 per cent stake in Standard Chartered Bank too soon, admits Mr Hughes, although it made a lot of money.

It bought into the between 50p and 100p in 1991, after adjusting for the four-for-one share split, and sold into strength - but missed the spectacular rise of the last six months when the shares rocketed to a high of 625p, although it too has since come off the peak to around 550p this past week.

Although the fund has no sector preferences, it tends to be overweight in manufacturing and light in oil and commodity stocks and people businesses. It is also biased towards medium and smaller companies with 70 per cent of its money outside the FTSE 100 companies.

Overseas holdings represent just 2 per cent of the fund and are unlikely ever to rise above 5 per cent, says Mr Hughes. "From time to time I'll dip overseas, if colleagues come up with a good idea," he says.

Mr Hughes is at his

busiest in recessions when there is a glut of buy opportunities. The fund itself performs poorly in recession and shines in economic upturn.

It is presently at a halfway house, says Mr Hughes, with on balance more buy than sell candidates.

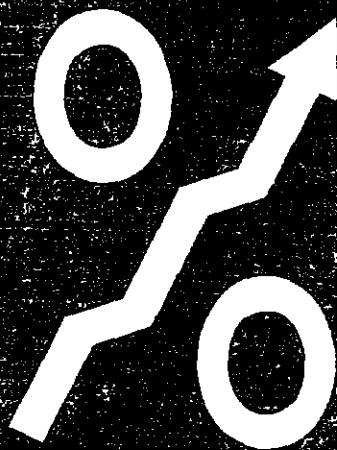
Rather than venturing into pastures new, the fund this year has been supporting rights issues and adding to existing holdings including United Biscuits, BICC and Lucas.

With the stockmarket quite high, Mr Hughes is being choosy about what to buy to ensure the right returns for the future. He is reasonably optimistic that with 2 to 3 per cent economic growth and 2 to 3 per cent inflation companies have a stable environment in which to prosper.

He keeps a watchful eye on the economic cycle to guard against buying too soon in a downturn, and selling too early in a recovery. His goal of beating the All Share index is no easy task with a big fund, so he keeps his fingers crossed that the years of recovery will continue to outnumber those of recession.

M&G Recovery Investment Trust is based at Three Quays, Tower Hill, London EC3. Telephone 0171-626-4588.

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BUILDING SOCIETY

Notice to Borrowers New Rates of Interest

The rate of interest charged on existing variable rate mortgages will be decreased by 0.20% pa gross with effect from 1 February 1996.

Borrowers in the Budget Repayment Scheme do not require to take any action at this time.

Notices will be issued to borrowers outwith the Scheme.

The Society's new basic rate is 7.49% pa gross.

Dunfermline Building Society Caledonia House
Carnegie Avenue Dunfermline KY11 5PJ Tel 01382 627727



loose change

New Tessa from Northern Rock...

Northern Rock's new limited issue Tessa will offer a fixed rate of 7.64 per cent tax-free for five years for maturing Tessa accounts of £9,000 re-invested with the society - if investors guarantee to leave the capital and interest untouched for the full five years. The compounded return over the whole period will be 44.5 per cent.

A variable rate option offers 7.25 per cent on the maximum £9,000 maturing Tessas rolled over with Northern Rock, and an ini-

tial 7 per cent on smaller balances over £3,000.

...from TSB

TSB is also launching a new fixed-rate Tessa, paying a guaranteed 7 per cent a year tax-free on amounts between £3,000 and the maximum of £9,000.

...and from A&L

Alliance & Leicester is offering a new variable rate Tessa, paying 6.1 per cent up to £3,000, rising to 6.5 per cent on amounts over £3,000 and 7.25 per cent on maturing Tessa accounts with £9,000.

Mortgage cut

Yorkshire Building Society has cut its variable mortgage rate to a market-leading 7.39 per cent from next month.

Fixed rate home loans

Coventry Building Society is offering five year fixed-rate mortgages at 6.79 per cent for up to 85 per cent of valuation, with no penalty for early redemption. A discount of 1.45 per cent for four years is also available on variable rate mortgages, but in this case there is a six month penalty for early redemption.

FEAR OF FINANCE Clifford German



Last week the Inland Revenue published a report, commissioned by the Chancellor, which promised a concerted effort to rewrite 200 years of piecemeal tax legislation, reverse the trend to increasingly lengthy and unintelligible Finance Bills and translate everything in future into plain English.

By the Inland Revenue's own admission it will take a team of dozens of tax officials some five years to complete the task.

Many experts, mainly among the ranks of accountants and tax advisers, are openly doubtful whether the task will actually be completed in time, because of the sheer complexity of the task and the resources which will be needed to do it properly.

Others doubt whether simplification of the language would actually help — because simplification would do away with paragraphs of clarification and simultaneously introduce new areas of doubt and differences of interpretation.

And even on the proposed timetable the review will not be ready until long after the start of self-assessment, which will oblige individual taxpayers to take over responsibility for completing their own tax statements and calculating their own tax liabilities for the financial year 1996-97.

Tax advisers are already rubbing their hands at the prospect of a flock of frightened taxpayers forced to seek professional advice to avoid making incriminating mistakes.

But London-based chartered accountants Smith & Williamson have already pointed out that a change in tax law introduced by Kenneth Clarke last month will soon make the daunting task of self-assessment more

rather than less complex.

From next April the tax rate on savings income goes down from 25 per cent to 20 per cent — bringing the rate on interest into line with the tax on dividends.

This is good news for standard rate taxpayers, assuming they have savings, but offers no benefit to higher rate taxpayers who remain liable to tax on interest and dividend income at 40 per cent. But the tax on dividends and savings income is traditionally calculated after earned incomes have been taxed.

So in April 1997 — when people receive their first forms for self-assessment — they will first have to deduct their tax-free allowances, then calculate tax at 20 per cent on the lower rate tax band, and then the tax at the basic rate of 24 per cent on the balance of their basic rate allowance.

Anyone who pays a marginal rate of 24 per cent on earned income, and also earns money from interest or from dividends which carries his or her income into the higher rate tax-band, will in future have to calculate tax at only 20 per cent on both interest and investment income which still falls short of the starting point for higher rate, and then the balance at 40 per cent.

Tax will already have been deducted at 20 per cent, but the individual will have to calculate the liability on the balance, send off the cheque, and then wait to see if the revenue queries the calculation.

If it does, the unfortunate taxpayer has been threatened with a very thorough going-over.

Things will be even more complex if the taxpayer has received interest gross which is still liable for tax. Not perhaps the best way to start a process of tax simplification.

Best borrowing rates

Telephone	% Rate and period	Max adv %	Fee	Incentive	Redemption penalty
MORTGAGES					
Fixed rates					
Hickley & Rugby	0800 774499	0.50 to 1/1/97	70	£250	3 yrs unemployment ins
Chelsea BS	01242 271441	4.74 to 1/2/98	80	£195	Free redundancy ins to 31/1/2/9
Chester BS	0800 243278	7.49 to 1/1/01	90	—	£300 cash rebate To 1/1/01: 6 mths interest
Variable rates					
Northam Rock BS	0800 591500	1.44 to 1/2/97	90	—	Refund valuation fee 1st 5 yrs: 6 mths interest
Greenwich BS	0181 858 8212	4.99 for 3 yrs	95	—	1st 5 yrs: discount reclaimed
Abbey National	0800 555100	6.34 to 31/1/01	75	—	To 30/1/01: individually determined
First time buyers fixed rates					
Bristol & West BS	0800 100117	0.95 to 30/11/96	90	£275	—
Newcastle BS	0191 244 2442	4.59 to 28/2/98	100	£100	—
Coventry BS	0800 128125	6.94 to 1/4/00	95	£250	—
First time buyers variable rates					
Scarborough BS	0800 590547	1.29 for 1 yr	95	—	£150 cash rebate 1st 4 yrs: rebate reclaimed & 6.2% of sum repaid
Greenwich BS	0181 858 8212	3.99 for 2 yrs	95	—	1st 5 yrs: discount reclaimed
Northam Rock BS	0800 591500	5.19 to 1/2/99	95	—	Refund valuation fee 1st 5 yrs: 6 mths interest
PERSONAL LOANS					
Telephone	APR	Fixed monthly payments (£3,000 over 3 years)			
		With insurance Without insurance			
Unsecured					
Direct Line	0141 248 9966	14.90E			
Midland Bank	0800 180180	15.40			
Abbey National	0345 545556	15.50			
Secured (second charge)		Max LTV	Advance	Term	
Clydesdale Bank	0800 240024	8.60	Neg	£3K - £15K	6 mths to 25 years
First Direct	0800 242424	9.70	80%	£3K to neg	Up to 40 years
Royal B of Scotland	Via branch	9.80	70%	£2.5K-£100K	3 years - retirement
OVERSEAS					
Telephone	Account	Authorised % pm APR	Unauthorised % pm APR		
Woodwich BS	0800 400900	Current	0.76	9.5	2.18 29.5
Alliance & Leicester BS	0500 959595	Alliance	0.76	9.5	2.20 29.8
Abbey National	0500 200500	Current	0.79	9.9	2.18 29.5
CREDIT CARDS					
Telephone	Card	Min income	Rate pm %	APR %	Annual fee
Standard					
Robert Fleming/S&P	0800 829024	MasterCard/Visa	—	0.98G	12.10 — D
Robert Fleming/S&P	0800 829024	MasterCard/Visa	—	1.00	14.60 £12
Royal B of Scotland	0800 161616	MasterCard	—	1.14	14.50 — D
Gold cards					
Co-operative Bank	0345 212212	Visa	£20,000	0.5417M	11.14 £120
Royal B of Scotland	01702 362890	Visa	£20,000	1.05	14.50 £35H
MidWest Bank	0800 200400	Visa	£20,000	1.14	15.90 £35
STORE CARDS					
Telephone	Payment by direct debit % pm	APR %	Payment by other methods % pm APR		
John Lewis	Via store	—	1.39 18.00		
Marks and Spencer	01244 681681	1.90A	25.30	2.00A	26.80
Sears	Via store	1.9A	25.90	2.20	29.8
APR Annualised percentage rate.					
A 1.58% (20.5% APR) for o/s bal over £1K.		C Clients of Coverts & Co only.		D No interest free period.	
E Available to comprehensive motor insurance policyholders aged over 25 years.					
H Annual fee: waived after first year if 50%+ charged to card during previous year.					
I All rates subject to change without notice.					
M Equivalent to base rate.					
NONEFACTS 01685 500677					
21 December 1995					

Best savings rates

Telephone number	Account	Notice or term	Deposit	Rate %	Interest interval
INSTANT ACCESS					
Portman BS	01202 292444	Instant Access	Instant	£100	5.00 Year
Skipton BS	01756 700511	3 High Street	Instant	£2,000	5.60 Year
Co-operative Bank	0345 252000	Pathfinder	Instant	£5,000	5.90 Month
Skipton BS	01756 700511	3 High Street	Instant	£30,000	6.50 Year
INSTANT ACCESS POSTAL ACCOUNTS					
Britannia BS	01538 392808	Capital Trust	Postal	£2,000	5.50 Year
B&W Asset	0800 303330	Instant Access	Postal	£10,000	6.05 Year
B&W Asset	0800 303330	Instant Access	Postal	£25,000	6.25 Year
Manchester BS	0161 839 5545	Money by Mail	Postal	£25,000	6.25 Year
NOTICE ACCOUNTS & BONDS					
Nottingham BS	0115 948 1444	Postmark	7 day P	£2,500	5.90 Year
Bradford & Bingley BS	0345 248248	Direct 60	60 day P	£15,000	6.50 Year
Cheltenham BS	0800 272505	120 Account	120 day P	£1,000	6.50 Year
Halifax BS	Local branch	Special Reserve	1 year bond	£10,000	6.90 Maturity
MONTHLY INTEREST					
Co-operative Bank	0345 252000	Pathfinder	Instant	£5,000	5.62 Month
Leopold Joseph & Sons	0171 588 2323	40 Day Notice	40 day	£10,000	6.6875 Month
Scarborough BS	0800 590578	Scarborough 50	50 day	£1,000	6.00 Month
Bradford & Bingley BS	0345 248248	Direct 60	60 day P	£15,000	6.30 Month
FIXED RATE BONDS					
West Bromwich BS	0121 525 7070	Guaranteed Growth	31/1/97	£5,000	6.80F Maturity
Sun Banking Corp	01438 744505	Investment Certs	2 yr bond	£1,000	6.60F Year
B'ham Midshires BS	0645 730721	Quantum Fixed	3 yr bond	£5,000	7.25F Year
Sun Banking Corp	01438 744505	Investment Certs	5 yr bond	£1,000	7.25F Year
TESSAS (tax exempt special savings accounts)					
Allied Trust Bank	0171 626 0879		5 year	£9,000	7.50 Year
Sun Banking Corp	01438 744505		5 year	£8,575	7.25F Year
Cheltenham & Gloucester	0800 717505		5 year	£1,000	7.25 Year
Universal BS	0191 232 0973		5 year	£1	7.10 Year
GUARANTEED INCOME BONDS (net)					
AIG Life	0181 680 7172		1 year	£5,000	4.55FN Year
AIG Life	0181 680 7172		2 year	£20,000	4.95FN Year
Financial Assurance	0181 490 9157		3 year	£20,000	5.20FN Year
Premium Life	01444 458721		4 year	£1,000	5.40FN Year
Pinnacle Insurance	0181 207 9007		5 year	£3,000	6.45FN Year
OFFSHORE (gross)					
Newcastle Bank, Gibr	00 350 76168	Nova Access	Instant	£5,000	6.20 Year
Newcastle Bank, Gibr	00 350 76168	Nova 90 O'shore	90 day	£25,000	6.85 Year
Alliance & Leics IOM	01624 663956	Investment Bond	1 yr bond	£10,000	7.00 Year
B'ham Midshires, Guern	01481 700680	Fixed Account	31.1.99	£5,000	7.25F Year
NATIONAL SAVINGS Accounts & bonds (gross)					
Investment Account	1 month	£20	£20	£50	5.25 Year
Income Bond	3 month	£20	£20	£50	5.75 Year
Capital Bond	Series 1	5 year	£100	£25,000	6.00 Year
First Option Bond	12 month	£100	£1,000	£25,000	6.50 Month
Pensioner's Guaranteed Income Bond	Series 2	5 year	£200	£25,000	6.75 OM
NS Certificates (tax-free)	42nd issue	5 year	£100	£1,000	6.40 F Year
8th Index linked	5 year	£100	£100	£25	6.80 F Year
Children's Bond Issue C (tax-free)	5 year	£25	£25	£7.85 F	OM

No need to rush out and buy a skyscraper

By Edmund Tirbutt

If asked to name the second best performing UK asset class not many people would say commercial property. Nevertheless between 1968 and 1994 it was the top performer for 10 years — second only to UK equities (13 years) and way ahead of gilts (3 years) and cash (2 years). Furthermore, some experts are predicting that commercial property, having been dull for most of the 1990s, is about to enjoy something of a purple patch.

Norwich Union has been beating the drum the loudest, pointing out that property currently has an average yield of around 8 per cent, which is similar to the yields on gilts and twice the average on equities.

It predicts that increases in rental growth will see commercial property outperform equities and gilts for the next three to five years. For the next two years it is talking in terms of total annual returns of 10-15 per cent.

Such forecasts will do little for investors desperate to give up the day job. Nevertheless, with most experts pointing to a continuation of low inflation and low interest rates, they are certainly worthy of due attention.

Paul Ashby at Barclays Unicorn, says: "Don't commit more than 5-10 per cent of a portfolio to property, but for those bearish about equities it is probably the next best thing after Bond PEPs."

Mark Searle, investment director at

private client stockbrokers Gerrard Vivian Gray, feels that property ranks alongside equities and gilts as an asset class. He points out that it has tended to produce the least volatile returns of the three and because its performance has a low correlation with the others, represents a good diversification of risk.

Those wishing to invest do not have to rush out and buy a skyscraper. Many of us in fact already invest in property unknowingly. Most managed funds in personal pension plans and unit-linked investment plans, for example, normally have a holding in property.

Some investment trusts specialise in property, although they buy shares of property companies as opposed to the

property itself. Property funds which invest in property — not property shares — are commonly available in personal pension plans and unit linked investment plans.

Those who have maximised their pension entitlements might wish to consider a single premium or regular premium unit linked contract. The former is commonly referred to as an "investment bond". Problems can, however, arise if a lot of investors wish to withdraw money at the same time. This is because property normally takes longer to sell than other assets. Most unit linked property funds therefore reserve the right to defer payment for three or six months should it prove necessary.



Property assets stand on solid ground

liquidity makes such a situation unlikely. Nevertheless authorised property unit trusts have only been permitted since 1991 and there are only two available — managed by Barclays Unicorn and Norwich Union.

The former, which has £23 million under management, invests only in smaller properties. The latter, which manages £109 million, invests in all sizes of property. It has enjoyed a slight edge on past performance.

It should nevertheless be stressed that not all experts agree with Norwich Union's outlook. Bristol & West Building Society, a market leader in lending on let commercial property, is notably lukewarm in sentiment.



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SCOTTISH WIDOWS

Harrison Ford takes cover in Patriot Games

Loach's grainy photography. For Patriot Games (9.20pm BBC1) - Philip Noyce's adaptation of the Tom Clancy spy thriller starring Harrison Ford - lean, mean Sean Bean practises the bad die he was to perfect in *Goldeneye*.

Robin Williams is on typically exuberant form as an inspirational teacher urging his pupils to seize the day in *Dead Poets Society* (11.10pm ITV). Peter Wether's rather over-the-top directorial centres on the effect his teachings have on a group of impressionable teenagers.

John Cleese gets to smash up a phone box in *Fawlty Towers* frustration for *Clockwork Orange* (11.25pm BBC1). In Christopher Morahan's frenetic comedy, he plays a fastidious headmaster, delayed on his way to address a conference in Norwich.

Faust (11.55pm BBC2) is Czech animation, but don't let that put you off. This reading of the Goethe legend is directed by Jan Svankmajer, an undisputed master of surrealistic story-telling.

The Middle Ages is the place to be today. Cadfael (8.30pm ITV) has a feature-length mystery for Derek Jacobi's 12th-century sleuthing monk, the creation of Ellis Peters, who died earlier this year. Brother Cadfael investigates when a nun is raped, murdered and encased in a block of ice. Despite the best efforts of the heritage industry, the British countryside was not deemed suitably medieval, so Hungary stands in for Shropshire. Quite what this says for three decades of socialist state planning is a different matter.

Screen Two: The Hour of the Pig (10pm BBC2) is supposed to be set in medieval Abbeville in Flanders, although the countryside looks distinctly Midi. Leslie Mcgahy's enicowable

film, which has already had a brief cinematic run, looks at the historical practice of trying animals in courts of law as if they were human. Not convinced? Then I'll just say two words: Colin Firth. Ol' Darcy-breeches plays an idealistic Parisian lawyer who has to defend a pig charged with murder.

The cultural highlights of the day are choreographer Mark Morris's adaptation of Henry Purcell's opera *Dido and Aeneas* (3.15pm C4), a performance combining opera and dance. But if you like your dance pure, then there's a rare chance to catch the extraordinary French dancer Sylvie Guillem, in the imaginatively titled *Sylvie Guillem* (7.35pm BBC2). The point of this three-part series, which continues

tomorrow, is for Guillem and a guest choreographer to try and make dance more televisual. In the first and best of the three, the Swedish choreographer Mats Ek helps Guillem explore the relationship between man and woman.

ITV/Regions

- ANGELA**
6.00pm GMTV (81/47404). 9.25 Mike's Christmas (82/25404). 9.55 Telenovela (49/63220). 10.20 The Pink Panther (1/286305). 10.50 Films: The Snow Queen (72/24930). 12.20pm News (81/85317). 12.30 Emmerdale (76/46). 1.00 Take That at Earls Court (1/660862). 2.05 Film: Return of the Pink Panther (42/65271). 4.10 Film: Her Alibi (59/40203). 5.50 News (84/9133). 6.00 Goldeneye: The Secret Files (8/4065). 7.00 Christmas in Emmerdale (7171). 8.00 Michael Barrymore's My Kind of People (10/45). 8.30 Cadogan (31/336). 10.00 The Beatles Anthology (6/442). 11.10 Film: Dead Poets Society (60/65404).
CLASH FILMS
1.30pm Film: The Sign of Four (62/2973). 3.20pm Film: The Sign of Four (71/97114). 4.15pm On the Side (78/176). 4.45-5.55pm Film: Clancy Street Boys (81/89039).
- MEDIAN**
6.00pm GMTV (81/47404). 9.25 Mike's Christmas (82/25404). 9.55 Telenovela (49/63220). 10.20 The Pink Panther (1/286305). 10.50 Film: The Snow Queen (72/2493). 12.20pm News & Weather (81/85317). 12.30 Emmerdale (76/46). 1.00 Take That at Earls Court (1/660862). 2.05 Film: Return of the Pink Panther (42/65271). 4.10 Film: Her Alibi (59/40203). 5.50 News (84/9133). 6.00 Goldeneye: The Secret Files (8/4065). 7.00 Christmas in Emmerdale (7171). 8.00 Michael Barrymore's My Kind of People (10/46). 8.30 Cadogan (31/336). 10.00 The Beatles Anthology (6/442). 11.00 News (87/5201). 11.10 Film: Dead Poets Society (60/6540). 1.30pm Film: The Sign of Four (62/2973). 3.20pm The Chart Show (71/97114). 4.15pm On the Side (78/176). 4.45-5.55pm Film: Clancy Street Boys (81/89039).
- WESTCOUNTRY**
As London
- TYKE TALK/YORKSHIRE**
As London
- CENTRAL**
As London
- BTV**
As London except: 12.30-1.00pm The Murrsters Today (76/045).
- S4C**
As C4 except: 12.00noon Slot Westminster (581/52). 12.30 Channel 4 Racing (3669/737). 3.15 Film: Miracle on 34th Street (6/906799). 5.00 Sinderella (2/538). 6.00 Newsworthy (68/4794). 6.10 E! News (1/35). 7.00p C4's Rediffusion (1/35). 7.40 P. Pump: Pump! (82/3355). 7.55pm Gaid Gwlad (87/4523). 7.45 Pavarotti yn Langfenon (9/50684). 8.45 News (77/9757). 9.00 Y Maphyr (94/48588). 10.50 Broedolau (22/065). 11.00 Y Maphyr (94/48588). 12.00 American Football (781/380).

Perplexity

- 

Deconstruct a small child's Christmas pleasure with an edition of *Shelf Lives* (9.35am R4) devoted to Barbie, the best-selling toy on the planet. Then deconstruct the rest of the family's Boxing Day amusement in *Across the Board* (9pm R2), a history of Monopoly, best-selling boardgame on the planet.

- SIXY ONE**
- 7.00am The DJ Kat Show
7(9578), 8.00 Mighty Morphin Power Rangers (82123), 8.30 Power Rangers Zeo (82123), 9.00 Court TV (75964), 9.30 The Oprah Winfrey Show (74404), 10.30 Concentration (75828), 11.00 Jerry Jay's Raphael (50406), 11.30 Star Trek: Voyager (85220), 12.30 Murphy Brown (34084), 1.00 The Waltons (95359), 2.00 Geraldo (37220), 2.30 The 101st Airborne (81222), 3.00 Oprah Winfrey Show (812428), 4.20 Undun (328974), 4.45 Klipper Tripper (537471), 5.00 Star Trek: The Next Generation (2311), 5.30 The Simpsons (81222), 6.30 Jeopardy! (4861), 7.00 LAPD (3046), 7.30 M*A*S*H (3718), 8.00 The Dick Van Dyke Show (81222), 8.30 Star Trek: The Next Generation (66607), 11.00 Law and Order (81539), 12.00 Late Show with David Letterman (814447), 12.45 The Tonight Show (91999), 1.30am The Edge (38640), 2.00-6.00am Hit Mix Loud Play (769408).
- SIXY MOVIES**
- 6.00am Showcase (95539), 8.00am The Untouchables (38572), 9.00 One Million Years B.C. (1966), 39(012), 1.00 Robin Hood: Men In Tights (1993), 2.00 The Untouchables (38572), 4.00 Friday (1993), 7(249), 4.00 Beethoven's 2nd (1993), 6.00am Starring Cary Elwes Grodin and Bonnie Hunt (60423), 7.00am Starring Cary Elwes and Elizabeth McGovern (762220), 10.00 The Flavor (1994), Comedy (1993), 11.00 Starring Cary Elwes and Richard Lewis (72268), 11.40 SIS Extreme Justice (1993), Drama starring Lou Diamond Phillips (762220), 12.00 The Chronicles of Invisibles Knight (1993), 1.00am Starring Cary Elwes and Richard Lewis (762220), 2.00 Ninjas (1992) (55114).
- MOVIE CHANNEL**
- 6.00am Comedy of Lassie (1946) (86881), 1.00 Yabba-Dabba Do Celebration (59442)-Dubbed, 2.00am The Untouchables Part 2 (1991) (36442), 12.00 Wind (1992) (49065), 2.00 My Favorite Wife (1940) (48201), 4.00 Seventeen The Captive (1978) (34742), 6.00 The Remains of the Day (1993) (761317), 7.30 Special Feature:

Seven (3773). 8.00 Demolition Man (1993). Action thriller starring Sylvester Stallone (635/10).
 Seven (3774). Last Tango in Paris (1994). Thriller starring Linda Fiorentino and Peter Berg (781/220). 11.50 Mr. Money Bags (1995). Comedy starring Dan Aykroyd and Martin Wayne (284/591).
 Seven (3775). Victim of Rage (1994/95). (832/399). 2.55 Innocent in a Small Town (1995) (561/624).
 Seven (3776). Storm Dunderkump (1993) (573/576).

STP MOVIES DISC

4.00pm Bona Sera, Sim Campbell (1968) (2591). 6.00 42nd Street (1993). Showbiz drama starring Walter Packer (406/77).
 6.30pm The 1981. A British film about a group of senior citizens who stumble on the secret of eternal youth (451/52). 10.00 Rain (1992). Drama starring Dustin Hoffman and Tom Cruise. Cruise stars as a selfish brother who learns to love his autistic brother. What he learns is an eventful cross-country drive to claim his inheritance (925/447/73). 12.20 Less Than Zero (1987). Drama starring Anthony Quinn and Frank Stallone (1970). (526/623).

76.000 Angels (12111625), **7.30**
 Neighbors (1290139), **8.00**
 Sons and Daughters (9771978),
 8.00 EastEnders (9770249),
 9.00 9770249, 9.00 The
 Sullivans (1603510), **10.00**
 A Dorothy L. Sayers Mystery
 (1296317), **11.00** Dallas
 (1205861), **12.00** Friends
 and Neighbors (9774065),
 12.00 Neighbors (1614626), **1.00**
 EastEnders (1210997), **1.30** The
 Bill (1613997), **2.00** The Sulli-
 vans (1603510), **2.30** You
 Being Stupid (9794881), **3.00**
 Angels (7607539), **3.30** Eldora-
 do (8262631), **4.00** The Paul
 Duggan Show (9770249), **4.30**
 Grayson's Generation Game
 (4185820), **6.15** Kenny's Com-
 ics (6097336), **6.25** East-
 Enders (1205861), **6.30** The
 Eldorado (7682202), **7.30** The
 Live Birds (8222249), **8.00**
 George and Mildred (2963949),
 8.00 The Bill (1613997), **8.50**
 The Skyway (5049064), **10.00**
 The Bill (6887997), **10.35** Cas-
 sic Sport (1617336), **11.35** Car-
 not Confidant (2175700),
 11.35 The Bill (6887997),
 12.45 Pils: Cattle Country of Mon-
 tana (2073282), **2.15-7.00am**
 Shopping in Paris (3163621),

The following passage contains the names of several people who made the headlines in the past year. Each name occurs in anagram form with its letters jumbled to form two or more complete, consecutive words.

To increase the perplexity, we shall not divulge how many names are hidden. A prize of the new *Chambers-Larousse Desktop Encyclopedia* will be awarded to the reader who successfully unjumbles the highest number of them.

Entries to: Perplexity, *The Independent*, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL to arrive by 10 January.

And may we wish a perplexing and profitable Christmas to you all.

"Only I can thrill the electorate sufficiently!" shouted the member for Barking-on-the-side.

"Let's elect him. He's male," added a supporter.

"He's a cool, limp liar," said another. "And anyway the voters can't stand his accent on air."

"Listen, you brainy lot," said an elder statesman of the party. "I pose him no threat. Lace my shoes together if you think I'm going to run, but what you're saying is mob triviality gone mad."

"We all know your policy," said another. "It's chuck in job, run for bank."

"Come now," said the ex-Minister. "There's an old Chinese saying: 'he who joins mops cleans fastest,' so let's join our mops together

Bridge Alan Hiron

Game a1; dealer South

North	
♦ 10 9 6 3	
♥ 8 6 3	
♠ A Q 10	
♣ 10 7 4	

East	
♠ 7 2	
♥ A 5 4 2	
♦ J 8 5 4	
♣ 9 8 6	

South

♠ A K J 8 5 4

♥ K Q

♦ 2

♣ A K Q J

West

♠ Q

♥ 10 9 7

♦ K 9 7 6 3

♣ 5 3 2

doubt the two best players in the room and he had just seen himself fall into a neat trap.

South opened a conventional Two Clubs and showed his spades after a negative response. North supported the spades, South revealed that an ace was missing, and the final contract was Six Spades.

West led the jack of hearts and, after winning with his ace, East switched smoothly to a low diamond. This took declarer by surprise. What was going on? Why had East not made the obvious switch to a club, up to the weakness in dummy, rather than lead into the teeth of the ace-queen of diamonds?

"I don't understand," remarked dummy plaintively. "How ever did you manage to go off in Six Spades?" South gritted his teeth - he and East (old rivals) were without

before the two wings of this great party find themselves forced to soberly sit in the marital dock."

"A divorce, you think? Very topical! But the Chinese also say 'he who closes a mine, opens a sewer of villainess'. The road to real power's blackmail, I say."

"I've never seen a worse mastery of politics. Follow you and we'll all end in jail."

"I see no clink," said the other, "but perhaps we'd do best to opt neither for me, too vivid, nor risk lazy him."

9 December competition:
Answers: Grapefruit (figure + trap), pineapple (nipple + ape), watermelon (lower + meant).
Winner: Loraine Atherton (Cleeveleys, Lancs.)

South soon came to what he was sure was the right conclusion. After winning a club return he would have been able to play the trumps in a normal way, cashing the ace first and then, in the event of West showing out, crossing to dummy's diamond entry to take a marked finesse.

It was clear now to declarer that East had indeed started with all the missing trumps and had shrewdly removed dummy's lone entry before the bad break was exposed.

Delighted at this opportunity to score against his old adversary, and making a mental note to congratulate him on a good try, declarer took a first round finesse in trumps to go one off.

Bridge Alan Hiron

Game all; dealer South

	North	
	♠10 9 6 3	
	♥8 6 3	
	♦A Q 10	
	♣10 7 4	
West		East
♠Q		♥7 2
♥J 10 9 7		♦A 5 4 2
♦K 9 7 6 3		♣J 8 5 4
♣5 3 2		♥9 8 6
	South	
	♠A K J 8 5 4	
	♥K Q	
	♦2	
	♣A K Q J	

"I don't understand," remarked dummy plaintively. "How ever did you manage to go off in Six Spades?" South gritted his teeth - he and East (old rivals) were without

South opened a conventional Two Clubs and showed his spades after a negative response. North supported the spades, Blackwood revealed that an ace was missing, and the final contract was Six Spades.

West led the jack of hearts and, after winning with his ace, East switched smoothly to the low diamond. This took declarer by surprise: What was going on? Why had East not made the obvious switch to a club, up to the weakness in dummy, rather than lead into the teeth of the ace-queen of diamonds?

by James Rampton



In *Sister Act* (Spm ITV), Whoopi Goldberg has a whale of a time as a

streetwise woman placed by the police in a nunnery for her own protection after witnessing a murder by her boyfriend (Hollywood's rent-a-human, Harvey Keitel). Maggie Smith earns some easy money playing the Mother Superior. Showing in the "BBC 100" series.

In *Scenes from a Mall* (11pm ITV), Paul Mazursky's slick drama, Woody Allen plays a sports lawyer whose marriage to a psychotherapist (Bette Midler) begins to fray at the edges on a Christmas shopping trip to a Beverly Hills mall.

by Gerard Gilbert

The odd shopping list or betting slip aside, England, My England (9.05pm, C4) is the last thing written by John Osborne. This imaginative, multi-layered life of composer Henry Purcell, co-written by Charles Wood but carrying all the hallmarks of its director, Tony Palmer, contains some of the most bizarre casting this side of panto, including former *EastEnders* barmaid

The Abbey (ppm; 3852) is a very funny—in an understated, Alan Bennett sort of way—new satire, in which Bennett traipses around Westminster Abbey, commenting unobtrusively on Poets' Corner, the Tombs, the Choir and so forth, while the English rain eavesdrops on the other visitors to the Queen's parish church. The sight of Gladstone being explained to a party of bemused Japanese tourists is one of the comely high spots of the season.

A repeat, I know, but many of you might have missed writer Nick Dear



and even Sir Roger Moore's excellent impersonation of Lord Ailsbury's father, the Duke of Devonshire, in the first of which it was shown earlier this year. Much closer in spirit to Austen than Andrew Davies's *Pride and Prejudice* adaptation, this was a work of love and a drama highlight of 1995.

ITV/Regions

- 6.00 **Children's BBC:** Paddington Peas. 6.05 Bump's Christmas. 6.15 Moonlight. 6.40 White Christmas. 7.10 Playdays. 7.30's *Unfunny* Curry Christmas. 7.55 McGea and Me. 8.15 The Flintstones. 9.25 Movie Game.
- 10.00 **Christmas Day in the Morning.** Carols, readings and prayers from Beaulieu. Guests include Sir Harry Secombe, Ruth Madoc and *Casualty's* Civie Mantle (S) (23805-25).
- 10.55 **BBC1 The Everlasting Story** (Wolfgang Petersen) (S) (23806-1). With Geri, enduring fairy tale about a lonely boy who enters an alternative world through a story book (23734-36).
- 12.25 **Neighbours** (S) (5075729). *
- 12.25 **News.** Weather (1206-212). *
- 12.55 **Top of the Pops.** Bjork and Jack Dee present the usual look back at 1995, and unveil the Christmas number one (S) (1258639). *
- 1.55 **Only Fools and Horses.** Christmas Special from *Only Fools and Horses* (S) (125861).
- 3.00 **The Christmas message to the Commonwealth** (S) (7-02831). *
- 3.10 **Noel's Christmas Presents.** Noel Edmonds, Cliff Richard, *Friendance* and more than 100 children: Haven't you got anything better to do? (S) (2254-157). *
- 4.20 **News.** Weather (888-8019). *
- 4.30 **BBC1 Hook** (Steven Spielberg 1991 US). One Spielberg version of the Peter Pan story with peculiar Iron Age undertones. The kids will be back. Robert Williams is the grown-up Peter, whose two children are kidnapped by Dustin Hoffman's Captain Hook (83551106). *
- 6.45 **Auntie's Brand New Bloomers** (S) (850818). *
- 7.00 **EastEnders.** First of two visits (S) (800). *
- 8.00 **Keeping Up Appearances.** Hycynth gets to grips with a mobile phone (S) (36361). *
- 8.30 **EastEnders.** Second slice of Christmas grief, and Pauline receives a distressing call from the prison (S) (15-98). *
- 9.00 **One Foot in the Grave.** Or is it two? (S) (7564). *
- 10.00 **News.** Weather (1207-1039). *
- 10.10 **BBC2 Indecent Proposal** (Adrian Lyne 1993 US). Robert Redford proves he has more money than taste by offering \$1 million to sleep with Demi Moore. But can Demi's marriage to Woody Harrelson survive such trauma? High-contrast, low-involvement thrills (S) (86-4583). *
- 12.00 **I Hate Christmas.** Poetic meditation on the spirit of Christmas (S108872). *
- 12.00 **The Greatest Music Party in the World.** Recorded last month at the NEC, Birmingham, with Rod Stewart, David Bowie, Mollie and Alanis Morissette (S) (8909-40).
- 1.35 **Weather** (2787331). In 1-4am.

- 7.05 Christmas with Cliff (R) (SI) (5338903). *
- 7.45 **REX** A Christmas Carol (Edwin L. 1938 US). Reginald Owen. The Secret in this uncutting version of Dickens's tale (9365309).
- 8.50 **REX** 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea (Richard Fleischer 1954 US). A fine cast - Kirk Douglas, James Mason (as Captain Nemo) and Peter Lorre - enlivens this handsome Disney version of the Jules Verne story (50117038).
- 10.55 Top Gear RAC Rally Special (SI) (1517583).
- 11.40 Treasures in Trust. The National Trust's 100th anniversary, celebrated in uncritical style (R) (SI) (685871).
- 12.55 The Hills Are Alive: The Sound of Music Phenomenon. An exploration of the enduring appeal of *The Sound of Music* (3347187).
- 1.35 Victory Stills. People who took part in VE Day, 1945, captured on camera (96747800).
- 1.55 Memories and Celebrations. 50th anniversary commemorations of VE and VJ Days (4123458).
- 3.00 Trick on Two. Magicians reveal their trade secrets (R) (SI) (920392).
- 3.10 La Bohème. Australian version of Puccini's 1896 op. 35 (9535 Paris) (SI) (32379651).
- 5.05 Today's the Day Christmas Special (2140767).
- 5.35 Some Enchanted Evening. Julie Andrews introduces a tribute to lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II (SI) (6827632).
- 7.00 Screen Two: Persuasion. Another chance to see Roger Michell's superb screen version of Jane Austen's classic - and to compare it (it's better) to *Pride and Prejudice* (R) (SI) (22658477).
- 8.40 Close Up. Richard Attenborough on a scene from Charlie Chaplin's *Cy Lights* (SI) (7525641).
- 8.50 The Queen. Her Christmas message to the Commonwealth (R) (SI) (743816).
- 9.00 The Abbey with Alan Bennett. The first in an excellent series in which he proves a tart guide to Westminster Abbey, beginning by looking at the building's close association with royalty (SI) (5108).
- 10.00 **REX** Farewell My Concubine (Chen Kaige 1993 Hong Kong/China). Bold, sweeping and intelligent tale of two Peking Opera actors over 50 years of China's recent history (SI) (858748).
- 12.30 Rowan and Martin's Laugh In - 25th Anniversary Special. Compilation includes snippets of guests Cher, Peter Sellers, Tony Curtis, Michael Caine and Richard Nixon (R) (SI) (29084).
- 1.30 **REX** A Night at the Opera (Sam Wood 1935 US). "You big bubble, why aren't you hitting that little girl and other classic songs, as the Marx Brothers meet Margaret Dumont and her cultured chums. (#830). To a Oom"

- 6.00 GMTV News.** 6.05 Special Feature. 8.00 News.
7.35 Bamey: 7.30 Tom & Jerry Kids. 7.00 Galaxy
High. 8.30 Stars and the Jewel Riders. 8.55
Power Rangers.
- 9.25 Christmas Morning Worship.** Roman Catholic
Mass from Arundel Cathedral in Sussex
(6073564).
- 10.25 The Little Engine That Could.** Animation (S)
(2355908).
- 11.00 Bugs Bunny** (3632).
- 11.30 Billie Holiday: Blues Again!** (Robert Stevenson
1974 US). The friendly Volkswagen takes on
property developers in Love Bug sequel
(81661816).
- 1.05 Disney Cartoon (R)** (48558767).
- 1.15 News, Weather** (26733564).
- 2.25 Coronation Street (R)** (44120309).
- 1.55 Take That at Earl's Court.** First of a two-part
recording of the boys' London concerts from earlier
this year (4143212).
- 3.00 The Queen (S)** (5602859).
- 3.10 Bill Hunterstars As Ivan Reitman** 1989 US).
Bull Witn. Dan Aykroyd, Sigourney Weaver
and Rick Moranis assembled for bigger effects and
predictable laughs (S) (59157564).
- 5.00 News, Weather** (6358125).
- 5.05 The Wind in the Willows.** Lushly animated
version of Kenneth Grahame's tale, featuring the
voices of Alan Bennett (Mole), Michael Palin (Toad),
Michael Gambon (Badger) and Rik Mayall (Rat)
(S) (7497729).
- 6.30 Christmas in Philadelphia.** Steve McDonald
and the case of the stolen whisky (24748).
- 7.30 Robson and Jerome** Christmas Special. Say no
more #496.
- 8.00 Sister Act** (Emile Ardolino 1992 US). Good-
natured comedy-musical comedy, with murder
whodunit Whoopi Goldberg taking refuge in an
inner-city nunnery and turning the sisters on
(72310645).
- 9.55 News, Weather** (964477).
- 10.00 Outside Edge.** Christmas special for the cricketing
sitcom. The boys and their wives go on a
cricketing trip to Corfu (S) (2019).
- 11.00 MAFS Scenes from a Marriage** (Paul Mazursky 1990
US). Wordy, dyspeptic comedy in which Woody
Allen and Bettie Midler's marriage falls apart while
they're out shopping (S) (800545).
- 12.35 Trenchcoat** (Michael Tuchner 1983 US).
Master artist Margot Kidder finds herself in a
real-life mystery (S) (289620).
- 2.15 Jean-Paul Belmondo** as dashing bandit through 18th-
century France (737987). To A 15am.

- 6.45 *Ulysses 31* (R) (701.6659).
- 7.05 *The Adventures Of Rex* (471.7309).
- 7.35 *Little Dracula* (R) (7325.309).
- 8.00 *The Big Breakfast*. Christmas Special with Eamonn, Billy Crystal, Barbara Windsor and Gloria Gynor (R) (701.91).
- 10.00 *Saved by the Bell* (R) (8337.039).
- 10.25 *Shyneddy*. Black in Comedy (R) (8331.274).
- 10.50 *Alcatraz Palace* (R) (8331.274).
- 11.25 *A Christmas Carol*. Oscar-winning, animated version, with the voices of Michael Redgrave, Alastair Sim and Michael Horden (7107.477).
- 11.55 *Prince Caspers*. Animated version with a riale Cinderella, and voiced by Jennifer Saunders, Jonathan Ross and Lenny Henry (R) (7685.361).
- 12.25 *Beauty* (8228.458).
- 12.35 *Christine*. Rare Special. Ecstatic young Christians get in the groove (767.757).
- 12.55 *Elmer Fudd*. Great Comedy 1992 UK. Pascale Delafosse plays a Welsh girl with Italian parents, feeling ostracised in the Valleys of World War Two, who meets a young, crash-landed German airman (3618.854).
- 3.00 *The Alternative Christmas Message*. Bridget Bardot takes on behalf of the animals (3312.106).
- 3.15 *Heroes of Comedy*. Being Tony Hancock, Frankie Howard, Benny Hill, Les Dawson, Monty Python and Wise and Paul Merton (R) (41.17.77.48).
- 5.45 *Coping with Christmas* (8227.48).
- 6.25 *It's the Queen* (S) (8227.48).
- 6.30 *The Snowman*. His Christmas on TV - this is must be Raymond Briggs (85.4).
- 7.00 *Black Turtle Diary* (John Ince 1995 UK). Lurchy middle-aged liberals Ben Kingsley and Gladis Jackson join forces to liberate turtles from a zoo. Harold Pinter wrote the script (8389.125).
- 8.45 *The Other Christmas Story*. Michael Starke, Simbad in *Brookside*, with an alternative Christmas tale (4594.48).
- 9.05 *England, My England*. John Osborne's best screenplay, co-written with Charles Wood, and by Tony Palmer in his inimitable style, marking the 300th anniversary of Henry Purcell's death (S) (9385.6380).
- 12.00 *Black*. How to Steal a Million (William Wyler 1966 US). High Society held movie set in the Paris art world, with Audrey Hepburn joining detective Peter O'Toole to steal her father's forged Cellini Venus (6127.513).
- 2.20 *Black*. Sentimental Journey (Walter Lang 1946 US). Terminally ill actress Maureen O'Hara adopts a young orphan as a companion for her husband. Remark: it would be allowed these days (6773.36).
- 4.00 *Black*. (9383.572). (R) (45.58).

- ANGLIA**
As London
- TYPE TEES/WORKSHOPS**
As London
- CENTRAL**
As London
- INTV**
As London
- NEEDHAM**
As London
- WESTCOUNTRY**
As London
- 54C**
As C4 except 7.05am The Adventure of T-Rex (4717305). 10.00 Saved by the Bell (8337309). 10.25 Little House on the Prairie (2381274). 11.55 Creature Comforts (6451106). 12.00 Father Christmas (17477). 12.30 Conny's Noddy (33503). 1.30 Mr. Mollins (1972816). 1.35 Film: Her Ruse (73244839). 3.30 Mr. Mollins: the Queen's Christmas Message (2481322). 3.40 5 Pump: Y'Dn' Na Doleyn Y Dole (804038). 5.20 5 Pump: Round a Round (8614361). 5.55 Newyddion 6 (546090). 6.00 Llyfr Chorth: Pwy S'yn Ddwad Dros y Pwll? Over-indulgence during the afternoon party has an adverse effect on the National Play (41922). 7.00 Potol y Cw (3651). 7.30 Braddwyd Roc a Rhy (95322361). 9.05 Noddy Bryn Teall (278125). 10.05 Darne Deud Christmas Experience (2205748). 11.10 Whose Line 'is it Anyway' (572019). 11.40-1.30am Film: Kill Me Again. John Dahl's homage to film noir Joanne Whalley-Kilmer is a femme fatale who prays a down-on-his-luck private eye (Al Kilmer) to take her dead lover after she double-crosses her Mafia boss. Also starring Michael Madison and Southey Green (173038).

Choice

- Radio 1**
9.01-9.08 AM
7.00-6.00 Clive Warren 1.00 Simon Mayo's Classic Years 12.00 Kevin Ayers 2.00 Soul on Sunday 4.00
Ave 5.00 Top 7.00 REM Live at the Bowl 11.00 Andy Kershaw 1.00 Mark Tonderai 4.00-6.30am Dave Pearce
- Radio 2**
10.01-10.08 AM
9.00-8.00 Don Mackean 9.05 Chris Sauter 10.30 Hazy on Sunday 12.00 Two-Way Family Favourites 1.00 Dick Barton - Special Agent 1.30 The Billy Cotton Band Show 2.00 Round the Bend 3.00 The Case I'm Hazy 3.30 More Music While You Work 4.30 Vinyl Go-Round 4.40 Tenor sang 3.30 Sun Day Something Simple 5.50 Charlie Chester 7.00 Richard Baker 8.30 Sunday Heat 9.00 9.00 Alan Keith 10.00 Rich Man Poor Man 12.05 Steve Midland 3.00-6.00am Alex Lester
- Radio 3**
10.01-10.08 AM
6.30am Open University
6.55 Weather
7.00-7.30 Prof and Pina
8.55 Choices of Three

The nature of happiness explored in **Don't Worry, Be Happy** (10.05pm R4).
The nature of Pogles explored in **Trumpton Riots** (12noon R4).

- 9.00** Brian Kay's Sunday Morning.
12.30 Full Score.
1.00 News. Fairest Isle Songbook.
1.15 Fairest Isle. Ken Russell pro-
duces a series of short feature
films.
- 1.45** The Sunday Concert. BBC
Philharmonic/Edward Downes.
Wagner: Overture; Rientz, Dvo-
rak: Symphony No 9 in E minor.
- 2.50** The Sunday Club. David Mc-
Monery plays and talks about
British keyboard music of the
grand seic.
- 3.50** Brendel's Beethoven. Alfred
Brendel (solo). Beethoven: Sonata
in G, Op. 79; Sonata in F sharp, C.
78; Sonata in D, Op. 28. (Interval:
Edwin Fischer on tempo and
melodrama.) Beethoven: Sonata in
E flat, Op. 90; Sonata in E flat,
Op. 7.
- 5.45** Sunday Feature: Hilde and
Seak. A search for the philoso-
pher Ernoch Spinoza.
- 6.30** The Piano Square in Mo-
nino, Op. 30.

- 7.00 From News 1995.
7.30 BBC From News: Live from the Royal Albert Hall. Choir of New College, Oxford, King's Consort and Choir/Robert King, Purcell: My heart is kindling. Jeremiah Clarke: Ode on Purcell's death. Come, come along. Purcell: My prayer, O Lord. (8.28-8.40) into the Garden. Sue Minter, curator of the Chelsea Physic Garden, strolls through the 17th century grounds with Hugh Walters'. Blow: Ode on the Death of My Purcell, Purcell: Remember not, Lord, our offences. Favourite Music for Queen Mary.
9.40 The Sunday Play Waiting for Godot. Samuel Beckett's epochal play about Alan Howard as Vladimir and Michael Maloney as Estragon.
11.30-12.30am Interpretations on Record.
- Radio 4**
(24-24hrs FM, 156kHz)
6.00am News Briefing.
6.10 Something Understood.
6.55 Weather.
7.10 Sunday Pages.

- 7.15 On Your Farm.
- 7.40 Sunday.
- 8.50 The Week's Good Cause.
- 8.55 Weather.
- 9.00 News.
- 9.10 Sunday Papers.
- 9.15 Letter from America.
- 9.50 Morning Service.
- 10.00 The Archers.
- 11.00 (LW) Test Match Special.
Commentary from the Fourth Test
between England and West Indies.
- 11.00 (FM) *Charismatics*.
- 11.30 (FM) *Midweek*.
- 11.45 (FM) Derek Cooper's Necessary
Pleasures. (1/5).
- 12.15 (FM) *In the Psychiatrist's
Chair*. With Sir Robert Stephens.
- 12.15 (FM) *Weather*.
- 1.00 (FM) The World This Week-
end.
- 1.55 Snipping Forecast.
- 2.00 (LW) Test Match Special.
- 2.00 (FM) Gardeners' Question
Time.
- 2.30 (FM) The Summer Series: *An
Imaginative Experience*. By Mary
Weale, with Nicholas Farell.
(1/2).
- 3.30 (FM) Pick of the Week.
- 4.00 (FM) Silk Road, Navio Kanu
Dhawal Samgamin, the depth of

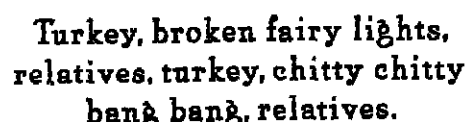
- young British Sikhs.
5.00 (FM) News; Right at the End of the Tunnel.
5.30 (FM) Shipping Please!
5.50 Shipping Forecast.
5.55 (LW) Test Match Special.
5.55 (FM) Test Match.
6.00 (FM) Six O'Clock News.
6.15 (FM) Feedback.
6.30 (FM) On the Ropes. John Humphrys talks to Albert Reynolds.
7.00 Children's BBC Radio 4: *Back Home* by Michelle Magorian. (3/4).
7.30 *Act Your Age*. (1/4).
8.00 (FM) Open University.
8.00 (FM) The Natural History Programme.
8.30 (FM) The State We're In. Beginning the portrait of 75 years in Northern Ireland. (1/6).
9.00 (FM) Growing Spaces.
9.30 (FM) Costing The Earth.
9.59 Weather.
10.00 News.
10.15 Medicine Now.
10.45 Devout Scapists. (3/6).
11.00 (FM) The Sound of Music.
11.45 Desert of Faith. (3/2)

turn

- SEY ONE**
6.00m (8544) Hurdle (W 565566) 7.00
1.00m (8544) Hurdle (W 565566) 7.00
Gadget (16) 57.12, 11.30 T & T (16) 67.1
12.00 W/M (82295) 1.00 Ent. Mink
menton Tonight (91943) 2.00 Hic
911092) 3.00 Star Trek: Deep Space
Nine (84189) 4.00 Young Indiana Jon
96534) 5.00 W/M (2159) 6.00 The
96534) 6.00 W/M (2159) 6.00 The
96534) 7.00 Beverly Hills 90210
(29740) 8.00 Melrose Place (20360)
9.00 Star Trek: Deep Space Nine
(25942) 10.00 Renegade (38011)
11.00 The Nanny (28011) 12.00
13.00 The Tonight Show (4428) 14.00
Carp Life (25238) 15.00 Home Wt. M
Lynn Play (701763).
- SEY MOVIES**
6.00m Showtimes (57943) 4.00 NF
Hours to Rama (1962) (7712189) 5.00
1.00 Dream Classics (1985).
(2380859) 12.00 Another Stakeout
(1993) (21045) 2.00 Author! Author!
(1982) (19363) 3.00 Steve Strouk
(1993) 4.00 Another Stakeout
(1993) 5.00 Comedy Thriller starring
Dreyfus and Emilio Estevez (93127)
6.00 Dying to Remember (1993)
Thriller starring Melissa Gilbert and
Scott Plank (34672) 7.00 Rapid R

- Lee** (197382), 11.40 Gaudy Girls
 (1993)
Levinson, 6.00 Jennifer Davis
 (512943), 1.30 The Adventures of
 Fairlane (1990) (778257), 3.10-
 6.00am Point It Black (1989).
 (71575615).
- MORE CHARM**
- Gammell**, 6.00 Pinocchio (1959), (49276).
 7.00 Puss in Boots (1983), (40030).
 8.00 Dogstarman and the Three Muske-
 rounds (1981), (732848), 10.00 Fom
 (1992), (52814), 12.00 The
 Dancers (1986) (1952).
 21027, 2.00 Easy to Love (1953).
 (17905). 4.00 Caribbean (1992).
 (8363). 6.00 Forever Young (1992).
 music legend singing his Gibson ac-
 cording to the lyrics of the song "I've
 Got a Feeling". 7.00 The Great
 Blues (1993). Country stars
 Dennis Quaid and Kathleen Turner.
 (32244). 10.00 Shakespeare (1991).
 Morley 19946247, 11.30 Traps
 (1992). 12.00 The Great British
 Passport to Murder (1992), (4281).
 2.00-6.00pm Ones are Not Enough
 (1975). 286254783.
- SIXTH SERIES GOLD**
- 9.00am Gateway** (763639), 9.30 Croko-
 Island (41547), 10.00 World's Worst
 Cars (698956), 10.30 Globetrotter
 (12547), 11.00 Gateway (65092).

- line (56721), 12.00 Zooker (36127),
12.00 The Vacation (46127), 1.00
Outing the Gals (91189), 1.30 The
Ones (44634), 2.00 Porter Love
Can't Love (5214), 2.30 Murphy Bro
(2856), 3.00 Palom Crest (77937),
3.00 My Blandings Brought His Dream
Homes (1948), (5837), 6.00 The Bar
fett Conquest (1954), Dramatic with
A Gardner and Humphrey Shapard (3400),
6.00 The Great Escape for Seven Brothers
(1954), Musical starring Howard Keel
and Jane Powell (45504), 10.00 Winn
Light (1952), Religious drama starring
Gail Truitt (31557-60), 11.25-20.00
The McKenzie Break (1970), War drama
(63294-95), 3.00
- TH 6:00P**
7.00am StarGate (797318), 8.00 The
Secret Garden (597692-4), 8.30 Jossy
Glenn (797295), 9.00 When the Bo
Comes In (395958), 10.00 The Pink
Panther Show (726824), 10.10 The
Pink Panther (7000), 10.20 Thunderbirds
Go (317794), 1.00 The Gals (36127),
(628745-74), 3.00 The Gals (36127),
5.15 Bergara (7713127), 6.00 Por-
ridge (342356), 7.00 Mordant and
Wise (315027), 8.00 Myrder
(781035), 9.00 Miami Vice (12104-
5)



Christmas Eve Television and Radio

Film choice

by James Hampton

For those many people unable to get tickets for the stage revival, Carol Reed's film version of *Oliver!* (10.15am BBC1) might provide some compensation. In this multi-Oscar-winning interpretation of the Lionel Bart musical, Ron Moody makes for a memorable Fagin while Mark Lester (now, I believe, an osteopath) is suitably cute as the boy who dares to ask for more.

The remake of *Miracle on 34th Street* (2pm C4), with Richard Attenborough, may be selling like hot mince pies in the video stores, but it is not a patch on the original. George Seaton's 1947 classic stars Edmund Gwenn as a department store Santa claiming to be the Real McCoy.



Grace Kelly comes over all claustrophobic

A Bond film has become as traditional as turkey at Christmas. This year it's *The Spy Who Loved Me* (3.40pm ITV), in which Roger Moore takes on the metal-toothed Jaws (Richard Kiel), the best baddie this side of *Goldfinger's* Oddjob.

Spielberg may be accused of sentimentality, but he certainly knows how to wow children, as delightfully proven by *ET the Extra-Terrestrial* (3.40pm BBC1). Groucho Marx once remarked: "I've been around so long I can remember Doris Day before she was a virgin." Day projects that familiar sense of recititude to pleasing effect in *Move Over, Darling* (8.45pm C4), where she plays a woman presumed dead in a plane crash, who reappears to discover her husband (James Garner) about to marry another woman.

In *Rear Window* (12.50am BBC1), James Stewart and Grace Kelly investigate suspicious goings-on at a neighbour's. Stewart's immobility only adds to the feeling of claustrophobic intensity.

Television choice

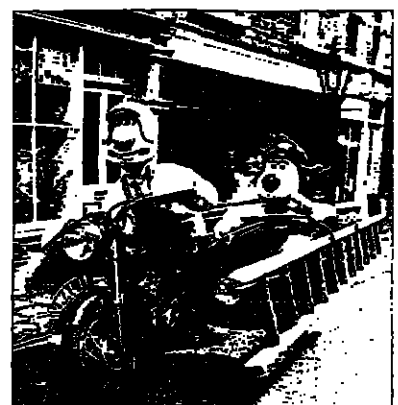
by Gerard Gilbert

Once upon a time, the animator who seemed to have Christmas wrapped up for himself was Raymond Briggs. These days it's the far more vivid and less patronising (remember Briggs' "ordinary" family in *When the Wind Blows*?) Nick Park who seems to have inherited the season - and Park's latest Wallace and Gromit claymation, *A Close Shave* (6.15pm BBC2), is his best yet. The inventor and his dog get mixed up with sheep-rustlers this time round, as Wallace (voiced again by Peter Sallis) falls for the charms of the local wool shop proprietress. Inventive and wholly beguiling stuff.

The heart of any true PG Wodehouse lover drops through his socks when TV

takes on one of the beloved texts. Douglas Livingstone's adaptation of the Castle Blandings tale, *Heavy Weather* (8.45pm BBC1) is not murderous, blessed with a wonderfully relaxed performance by Peter O'Toole as the Earl of Emsworth. Here's a man, you feel, who might well have thrown food with the best of them at the Drones Club. The story itself concerns a nephew, a show girl and a prize pig.

Less convincing is Helen Mirren as a plain Yorkshire housewife in *The Hawk* (10.20pm BBC2). David Hayman is supposed to experience a slow realisation that her husband may be a serial killer, but looks too intelligent for the part.



Wallace and Gromit speed into his hearts

If the idea of Ken Russell's *Treasure Island* (7.30pm C4) has you rushing to join the turkey in the oven, fear not. This is a jaunty reading of Robert Louis Stevenson, complete with a female Long "Jane" Silver.

ITV Regions

BBC1

- 7.30 **The Pink Panther** (Blake Edwards 1964) UQ. Peter Sellers niftily stole this romantic comedy from beneath the noses of its ostensible stars, David Niven and Capucine, as the bumbling Inspector Clouseau (59781182). *
9.25 **News, Weather** (5258927).
9.30 **Promises of His Glory** (S) (5680569).
10.15 **Oliver!** (Carol Reed 1968 UK). Critics hammer on about how Lionel Bart's musical draws Dickens's teeth, forgetting that a) Dickens could be as sentimental as the next one, and b) he would probably have thoroughly approved of Reed's lively enriching of Bart's stage musical, with Ron Moody as Fagin, Oliver Reed as Bill Sikes, and Mark Lester as Oliver (17512231). *
12.35 **A Filmmaker's Christmas** (2053786).
1.00 **News, Weather** (48588908).
1.15 **EastEnders Omnibus** (S) (310521).
3.40 **ET the Extra-Terrestrial** (Steven Spielberg 1982 US). Spielberg's entrancing fantasy about a lonely boy (Henry Thomas) who befriends a stranded alien (S) (274250). *
5.30 **Antiques Roadshow - the Next Generation**. The young people's roadshow at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum (S) (511057). *
6.15 **News, Weather** (821279). *
6.30 **Local News, Weather** (485785).
6.35 **Christmas with Cliff**. Sir Cliff Richard choppers in to a country estate to celebrate Christmas with some Surrey primary-school children (642811). *
7.15 **Last of the Summer Wine** (582873). *
8.15 **Zips and Zips**. Can Ben be relied upon to buy the turkey? (S) (698786). *
8.45 **P G Wodehouse's Heavy Weather**. Peter O'Toole is a touch ectomorphic in build for my idea of Lord Emsworth, the eccentric, pig-loving owner of Blandings Castle, but at least this version does without those perennial casting nightmares, Jeeves and Wooster. It's the usual Wodehouse tale of a young son of the gentry mixed up with chorus girls and aunts (5041205).
10.20 **News, Weather** (136595).
10.35 **The Marmalade and Wine Christmas Show** 1975. Gordon Jackson, Diana Rigg and Patsy Stone were the guests (R) (2321304). *
11.40 **The First Communion of Christmas**. Live from Lichfield Cathedral, Staffordshire (S) (314873).
12.50 **Rear Window** (Alfred Hitchcock 1954 US). Confined to a wheelchair after an accident, news photographer James Stewart begins to spy on his neighbours in Hitchcock's brilliant and self-revealing meditation on voyeurism. Grace Kelly plays Stewart's girlfriend (465941). *
2.40 **Weather** (5991458). To 4.55am.

BBC2

- 7.30 **Children's BBC: William's Wish Wellingtons**. 7.35 **The Fox Christmas Story**. 7.45 **Spot's Magical Christmas**. 8.10 **Playdays**. 8.30 **Bhsa**. 8.45 **Jackanory**. 9.10 **The Animals of Farthing Wood**. 9.35 **A Monster Christmas**. 10.05 **Blue Peter**. 10.30 **Grange Hill**. 10.55 **The Queen's Nose**. 11.20 **Westward Ho!**. 11.40 **Star Trek**. 12.30 **Fantasy Football League** (50208).
1.00 **Dreaming of Ajax**. Gary Lineker ponders the success of European champions, Ajax FC (R) (S) (5920618).
1.45 **The O-Zone** (R) (S) (73897618).
1.55 **Donovan's Reef** (John Ford 1963 US). Ford's underrated comedy - his last twinning with John Wayne - about three American sailors (Wayne, Lee Marvin and Jack Warden) who settle down on a South Sea island at the close of the Second World War (9769279). *
3.40 **The Making of the Mole** (R) (9403892).
4.30 **Christmas in Vienna** 1995. Placido Domingo and José Carreras are joined by Natalie Cole for a musical celebration of Christmas (S) (53231).
5.30 **Space Precinct** (S) (542927). *
6.15 **Wallace and Gromit in A Close Shave**. Oscar-winning animator Nick Park's latest charm (S) (357927).
6.45 **Ranoch the Red Deer**. Wildlife film about a red deer from the Scottish Highlands (S) (489279). *
7.35 **Red Rum - a National Treasure** (S) (902960).
8.15 **On the Road Again**. Simon Dring reaches Goa (S) (69328).
8.45 **The Mrs Merton Show Christmas Special**. Gary Rhodes, Amanda Barrie and Johnny Briggs of *Coronation Street*, and Glenda Kinnock get a gentle ribbing (S) (628927). *
9.15 **Three Fights, Two Weddings and a Funeral**. Last Christmas's fun and games with the talented Steve Coogan, in which Pauline Calf thinks she's found Mr Right (R) (S) (596144). *
9.50 **Bottom** (R) (178705). *
10.20 **Screen Two: The Hawk**. A serial killer, nicknamed "the Hawk", is preying on women, and a suburban wife, played by Helen Mirren, begins to suspect it's her husband (S) (6355453).
11.45 **Unplugged - Phil Collins** (S) (309366).
12.35 **A Classic Ghost Story - Stalls of Barchester**. Clive Swift from *Keeping Up Appearances*, *Coronation Street*'s Thelma Barlow, and Robert Hardy star in this MR James ghost story (R) (7019903).
1.20 **La Beauté du Diable** (René Clair 1949 F/R). Old Michel Simon sells his soul to the devil so that he can be young and handsome enough to seduce Simone Valère, in Clair's witty version of the Faust legend (S) (616671).
2.55 **Weatherline** (5991839). To 3.05am.

ITV/London

- 6.00 **GMTV**. 6.00 **The Sunday Review**. 6.30 **News and Sport**. 7.00 **The Sunday Programme** (54809).
8.00 **Disney Adventures** (S) (4253647). *
9.25 **Film: Big Foot** (Danny Huston 1987 US). Children's drama, being screened in two parts. Two children camping in the mountains of Oregon discover they are not alone (R) (2594124).
10.15 **Link** (S) (7224279). *
10.30 **This Sunday**. Including, at 11.00, **Morning Worship** from Romford Centenary Halls (S) (13434). *
12.30 **The Elf Who Saved Christmas**. Children's drama (47724).
1.00 **News, Weather** (26754057). *
1.05 **London Today** (26753328). *
1.10 **Hollywood's Greatest Stunts** (6145724).
2.10 **Disney's The Sword in the Stone** (Wolfgang Reitherman 1963 US). Long-neglected Disney version of T.H. White's novel about the boyhood of King Arthur (S20114).
3.40 **The Spy Who Loved Me** (Lewis Gilbert 1977 UK). Curt Jurgens wants to destroy the world, and Roger Moore, if he can stop smirking at Barbara Bach, is the only man who can frustrate him (89250298). *
6.00 **News, Weather** (820540). *
6.10 **Local News, Weather** (883144). *
6.15 **Michael Ball**. The boyish singer is joined by Dusty Springfield and Michael Bolton (S) (388057). *
7.15 **Christmas Heartbeat**. Last Christmas's *Heartbeat*, to be exact (R) (S) (317569). *
8.15 **You've Been Framed!** (S) (616182). *
8.45 **Taggart: Flesh and Blood**. Another dusted-down repeat from ITV, with the late Mark McManus investigating a cache of explosives (R) (519250). *
10.15 **News, Weather** (125908). *
10.25 **The Cabell Family Christmas**, with Cher (5462873).
11.55 **This Christmas Eve**. From York, with readings from the Bible, John Betjeman and AA Milne (320601).
12.55 **Running Against Time** (Bruce Seth Green 1990 US). A man discovers a time machine and uses it to try to prevent the Kennedy assassination and the Vietnam War (710903).
2.40 **Agatha Christie's Dead Man's Folly** (Clive Donner 1966 US). Peter Ustinov plays the Belgian sleuth, aided by Constantine Cummings and Tim Pigott-Smith (S119800).
4.25 **The Elm-Charmed Forest** (Milan Blazekovic 1986 US). Cartoon featuring an artist who can speak to animals (3303699). To 5.55am.

Channel 4

- 6.05 **Blitz!** (R) (6337304).
7.00 **The Herbs** (R) (9724892).
7.15 **Lift Off** (R) (S) (28989).
7.45 **The Great Bong** (S) (7806057).
8.40 **The Baby-Sitters Club** (93415).
8.50 **Where on Earth Is Carmen Sandiego?** (S) (714050).
8.55 **Wise Up** (S) (3661453).
9.25 **The Breakfast Club**. Cliff Richard interviewed, while Neil Sedaka sings a carol (6004474).
10.25 **Saved by the Bell** (2569144). *
10.50 **The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn** (Michael Curtiz 1960 US). Buster Keaton has a part in this recent version of the Mark Twain classic (42172811).
12.50 **Blue Christmas**. Fantasy short about two boys visited by the spirit of Elvis Presley (54785182).
1.05 **Little House on the Prairie** (7753447).
2.00 **Miracle on 34th Street** (George Seaton 1947 US). Thoroughly beguiling fantasy in which a New York department store Father Christmas (Edmund Gwenn) claims to be the real Santa Claus (667786). *
3.45 **The Mousehole Cat**. Animation (S) (4212908). *
4.25 **The Adventures of Mole**. Animation based on *The Wind in the Willows* and using the voices of Peter Dinklage, Richard Briers, Hugh Laurie and the late Paul Eddington (S) (5502637).
5.30 **Hollycats** (R) (S) (540).
6.00 **The Persuaders!**. Brett Sinclair comes round after a boozy night to find that he has a wife (600577). *
7.00 **Father Christmas**. Raymond Briggs's animation (S) (6328).
7.30 **Ken Russell's Treasure Island**. Oh, lumme, Ken Russell writes and directs a version of Robert Louis Stevenson's classic tale, with a female Long "Jane" Silver (Hetty Baynes) (769989).
8.45 **Move Over, Darling** (Michael Gordon 1963 US). Highly regarded Doris Day comedy in which the clean, all-American Day returns home after five years stranded on a desert island to find her husband, James Garner, has remarried (577344).
10.45 **ER**. Repeat Christmas edition of the American medical saga (723502).
11.40 **Whose Line Is It Anyway?** (799960).
12.10 **Glam Top Ten**. Alan Freeman and Tony Blackburn introduce music from the 1970s: Slade, T-Rex, Gary Glitter, Sweet, Mud, Wizard, Suzi Quatro and Alvin Stardust (R) (S) (5920941). *
1.40 **Cavalcade** (Frank Lloyd 1933 US). Oscar-winning version of Noel Coward's chronicle of an upper-class English couple, their family and their servants from the Boer War to the early 1930s. Stars Diana Wynyard and Olive Brook (637212).
3.40 **Rawhide** (9401212). To 4.35am.

ITV/Regions

- ITV**
6.00am GMTV (S) (54809). 6.00am Disney Adventures (S) (4253647). 6.25am GMTV (S) (54809). 6.30am News and Sport (S) (54809). 7.00am The Sunday Programme (S) (54809). 8.00am Disney Adventures (S) (4253647). 9.25am FFI: Big Foot (S) (2594124). 10.15am Link (S) (7224279). 10.30am This Sunday (S) (13434). 12.30pm The Elf Who Saved Christmas (S) (47724). 1.00pm News, Weather (S) (26754057). 1.05pm London Today (S) (26753328). 1.10pm Hollywood's Greatest Stunts (S) (6145724). 2.10pm Disney's The Sword in the Stone (S) (20114). 3.40pm The Spy Who Loved Me (S) (89250298). 6.00pm GMTV (S) (54809). 6.00pm Disney Adventures (S) (4253647). 6.25am GMTV (S) (54809). 6.30am News and Sport (S) (54809). 7.00am The Sunday Programme (S) (54809). 8.00am Disney Adventures (S) (4253647). 9.25am FFI: Big Foot (S) (2594124). 10.15am Link (S) (7224279). 10.30am This Sunday (S) (13434). 12.30pm The Elf Who Saved Christmas (S) (47724). 1.00pm News, Weather (S) (26754057). 1.05pm London Today (S) (26753328). 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